WHITE & BLACK

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WHITE AND BLACK

BY

HUBERT ANTHONY SHANDS

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CHAPTER I

"Now that Bob has got the medal, Will, it is time that we decided definitely where we shall send him to college," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, time enough for that," answered Mr. Robertson, "and besides we must wait a little while longer to see what the crops are going to do."

"Crops or no crops, Bob is going to college, and he is going this fall. Bob is such a good boy, and he has taken the medal for scholarship at the high school, and then, Will, you must remember that he was converted last summer. I am not afraid to send him off to college now. Oh, Will, I am so proud of him. And you too, Will, you are proud of him, aren't you, aren't you, Will?"

"Yes, Mamie, I'm proud of him all right, but you see it will cost money, a lot of money. And there is nowhere we can get it unless the crops turn out well and the price is good."

"Oh, we can sacrifice, Will. We can do without. Bob must go to college. He is eighteen now, and it is time for him to go."

"Yes, honey, I know all about that, and we'll see about it."

"No, no, Will, you must promise me. There have been so many things you were going to see about that have never come to pass. You must promise me."

"All right, then, we will send Bob to college this fall if—"

"No, Will, no 'if' about it. Say 'We will send Bob to college this fall.'"

"Well, honey, I was just going to say, 'if possible.' We certainly can't send him if it is impossible. We can't do the impossible."

"Oh, Will, Will, so many things have been impossible."

"Yes, dear heart, I know it. I know it. So many things that we hoped for have never come to us, and it has been my fault. I know that."

"No, Will, don't say that."

"Yes, it is true. Why disguise it? Why deny it?"

"But, Will, think, think of Bob, what a fine boy he is, how smart, how good, how handsome! Oh, Will, isn't it enough to fill us with happiness to have him?"

"Yes, yes, honey, he is a mighty fine boy."

"And to think of his taking the medal for scholarship, such a beautiful medal it is. And Brother Maxcy told me his was such a sound conversion. He said he never saw a more earnest and sincere conversion in his life. Oh, Will, our son is a true, true Christian!"

"Yes, honey, that's all mighty fine, and we'll strain every nerve—we will send him to college."

"Oh, Will, think what a magnificent lawyer he will make, or maybe a consecrated minister of the gospel."

"Yes, yes, honey, that will come in its time, but I have been out in the field all day, honey, and I'm awfully tired and sleepy. Suppose we go to sleep now."

"Oh, I can't sleep, Will, for thinking about it. Listen, I will run into Bob's room and tell him all about it. And when I come back, I'll tip in, so you won't hear me."

"All right, honey," said Mr. Robertson sleepily, offering his lips for his good-night kiss.

Mrs. Robertson kissed him, saying, "Good night, dear,"

and rose from beside him, threw on a kimono, and stole out quietly to go to Bob's room.

They had had two other children, a boy and a girl, but both had died in infancy, the one of typhoid and the other of malaria, leaving Bob an only child.

CHAPTER II

It was in the early part of June, 1921, and only two weeks since Bob had been graduated from the high school of Compton with the highest mark for scholarship, and its reward, a gold medal, had been bestowed on him amid the admiring and envious glances of his class-mates.

Compton was the county-seat of a county in southeast Texas, that portion of the state which had been settled before the Civil War by planters from North Carolina and Alabama, who had brought with them their black slaves.

They had cleared away the forests and made fields for the cultivation of cotton and corn. In 1921 these fields had been in such cultivation for something like sixty or seventy years. There had been infrequent and limited rotation of crops, so the fertility of the soil was largely exhausted. And the excessive rains of winter had washed many deep gullies through the sand and clay of the farms that lay, as it were, on their backs offering up in continuing protest these red gashes on their fronts to the inspection of unpitying skies.

The old Benton place, as it was commonly known throughout the county, was about a mile east of the small town of Compton. And the west boundary of the place was Berry Creek, which was subject to violent overflows, as much of the surface soil of the neighboring hills had been washed into the creek bed and choked up the channel.

The farm was traversed from west to east by one of the main highways of the county, and on this a surface of gravel and clay had recently been laid to make the road passable in wet weather. One of the two railroads that crossed each other at Compton also cut through the farm, but near its north end, and ran approximately parallel with the highway. Both the railroad and the highway crossed Berry Creek, the former on a high trestle, the latter on a low bridge approached at either end by an earthen dump surfaced with concrete.

The old Benton place containing five hundred acres had belonged to Mrs. Robertson's grandfather, who had lived on it and cultivated it with his slaves. It had been inherited by her through her father, and she and Will Robertson had moved on it as bride and groom twenty years before, in June of 1901. The old Robertson place of five hundred acres, usually called by the Robertsons "the lower place," as being farther down the creek, constituted, together with fifteen hundred acres of timber land in the eastern part of the county, the inherited estate of the groom. This "lower place" was three miles to the west, had never been reached by any good road, and was therefore less accessible to travel, as well as farther from town than the old Benton place. It was natural therefore that the young couple should choose the latter as the site for their home.

The old house of Grandfather Benton, originally built of logs that were later planked over, had fallen into decay, and had long been inhabited by Negro tenants. It sat on the north side of the road. The young people built their new home on the south side of the road, placing it on the top of a hill that was the highest point in all the country around.

It was a frame house of two stories, painted white, with green window blinds, and together with the outbuildings cost five thousand dollars. It was known to all on the farm as the "big house." It faced north toward the road, and was square in shape except that there was an ell at the rear, where were the kitchen and pantry. One entering at the front passed across a large porch into a hall running through the center of the house to a back porch. Two downstairs rooms were on each side of the hall, which contained a staircase leading up to a hall and four rooms similarly arranged above. In the summer time this hall was a cool place for an afternoon siesta, but on a winter morning it felt as cold as the Arctic regions despite the fact that there was a shut door at each end. The first room to the right of the front entrance was the family sitting-room. Across the hall from it was the parlor, rarely used for any purpose. Behind the parlor was the dining-room, and across the hall from it a bedroom called the "preachers' room," in which visiting ministers, and many of them came to the Robertsons', usually stayed.

Immediately in front of the house and extending around to the west side was a flower garden, not very well tended, but enclosed by a picket fence. From the front gate in this fence a graveled road bordered by planted pecan trees led to the highway about three hundred yards distant. The same road bent west around the garden and headed toward the rear of the premises, passing a well and tank tower from which water was supplied to the house by a windmill that screaked badly at times and at other times didn't pump very well for lack of wind.

To the west of the house there was a sharp declivity falling toward the creek bottom, in the nearer edge of

which was planted a field of cotton. From the house ran a road through this field to a gate called the bottom gate, which afforded a shorter way than the highroad to the town. Beyond the field were the trees along the creek bank. Over their tops in the near distance could be seen the houses and streets of Compton and the court house in the middle of the square. None of these was particularly picturesque, as the houses were not imposing and the streets were neither very wide nor handsome nor greatly frequented by either pedestrians or equipages, except perhaps on Saturday afternoons, when all of the Negroes of the surrounding farms would come to town.

Behind the house was first a back-yard, then the barns, stables and horse lot, then the vegetable garden, and behind that the field cultivated by Joe Williams, a Negro tenant. This field was traversed by a spring branch having at its head around the spring a small grove of towering pine trees, and further down along its course a row of cottonwoods on either side, until it reached the elms, oaks, hackberries and willows of the creek bottom. The spring branch was half way between the big house and the tenant house of Joe Williams, the roof of which could be seen from the big house through the foliage of the intervening trees.

On the east of the house was a five-acre patch on which was grown usually such small crops as sorghums, sweet potatoes, cowpeas, peanuts and watermelons. Beyond this patch was a thirty-acre wood lot, covered mainly by young second growth pines, which were interspersed here and there with sassafras, sycamores, elms and oaks.

Between this wood lot and the highway was a small pasture of something like twenty acres, called the home pasture, in which calves and the horses soon to be needed

were allowed to graze. The big pasture and hay meadow were on the other side of the road, near the north end of the farm, at some considerable distance behind the old Benton homestead occupied by the Negro tenant, John Ramsey, and his numerous family.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning Mr. Robertson was up early and out in the fields. He went first to that tilled by Joe Williams, a Negro of fifty years of age, who had lived on the place continuously for twenty-five years, and had reared there his family of three girls, Lucindy, Mariah and Ella. His wife was named Malviny.

Neither Joe nor any of his family was to be seen at work in the field, so Mr. Robertson rode on to the tenant house, where he found Malviny sweeping off the front porch.

"What's the matter, Malviny?" he asked. "Why aren't the folks out in the field? That cotton's got to be dirted up, and it needs to be given a last chopping to get rid of the cockle-burrs and those bunches of Johnson grass."

"Yassuh, Mr. Will, I wuz a-tellin' Joe about it, but he say better wait till the jew gits offen de plants. He say dey ain't no rush, and he's feelin' sorter po'ly dis mawnin'. He jus' 'lowed he'd lay a little later. And den Lucindy's got de fever agin. She mighty nigh shook de kivvers offen her yestiddy evenin', she wuz chillin' so awful. But I'll call him—Joe, Joe, Mr. Will's out hyeer."

Joe came out of the house chewing. "Good mawnin', Mr. Will," he said, his utterance muffled by the corn-bread in his mouth. "I ain't 'spected you to be up and aroun' dis soon. It's powerful early, Mr. Will. I ain't had time to finish breakfus' yit."

"Well, I think it's high time you were in the field, Joe, and where are the girls?"

"Dey's kinder scrappin' up in de kitchen, Mr. Will, all 'ceppen Lucindy. She's down agin wid de chills an' fever. Looks like we sho' do have a power of sickness."

"It does look that way, Joe. But hustle around now and get out there with Mariah and Ella. I reckon Malviny can look after Lucindy all right."

"All right, Mr. Will, but don't you reckon we better wait till de jew lifts. You know it's powerful unhealthy to git all wet up wid de jew, an' Mariah's been feelin' puny like for mighty nigh a week, an' layin' by time is mos' hyeer anyhow. Dey ain't no rush, Mr. Will. I got de bes' cotton dey is on de place an' de cleanest. And dey ain't none of 'em on de lower place kin beat me. I wuz down dar las' week. And dey ain't none of 'em can hold a light to me. An' de cawn's done laid by. I got a cawn crop made, Mr. Will. Is you ever seed sich cawn?"

"Well, yes, it is pretty good corn, Joe, but we've got to make a good crop this year. I am going to send Bob off to college. And he will need money."

"Waal, suh!" interposed Malviny, "Mr. Bob's gwine off to college. Whar you gwine to send him, Mr. Will?"

"I haven't decided yet, but Miss Mamie and I were talking about it last night, and we are going to send him somewhere."

"Waal, suh!" said Malviny, "an' whut's Miss Mamie gwine to do widout him?"

"It is going to be hard on her. But we'll all have to try to make it up to her somehow, Malviny."

"We sho' will, Mr. Will, 'cause Miss Mamie's sho' gwine to grieve atter him. She keeps him in de middle of her heart all de time."

Mariah and Ella came out on the porch, bashfully fingering their aprons before Mr. Will.

"Whut you reckon, Ella," said Malviny, "Mr. Bob is gwine off to college."

"Yassum, dat sho' wuz a pretty medal dey give him over to de high school," said Ella.

"I'm powerful glad he's goin'," said Joe. "You know, Mr. Will, I always is believed in eddication. I sont all my girls to school. An' all of 'em kin read an' write an' figger better'n whut I kin now."

"Yes, that's so, Joe, and you have done right. You have really done better by them than you could afford. But get your hat, Joe, and come along. I want to see that mule hitched to your plow before I leave. I've got to go over to John Ramsey's house and stir him up."

Joe went into the house and came back with a torn and misshapen old rag of a hat so full of holes that no imagination could regard it as a real protection against the sun.

"Is that the best hat you've got, Joe?" asked Mr. Robertson, as he rode along beside him on the way to Joe's horse-lot.

"Yassuh, it's de bes' one I got to work in. Of co'se I's got my Sunday hat, but it won't do to wear dat in de field."

"Well, I'll have to look around the house and see if Mr. Bob or I haven't an old one we can give you."

"Thank you, Mr. Will, wonder if you ain't got some old pants, too. And Malviny wuz jes' sayin' las' week she bet Miss Mamie wuz gwine to give her a dress. She say she dreamed she seen Miss Mamie givin' her dat ar spotted dress Miss Mamie been a-wearin' for de longest."

Mr. Robertson laughed, and said, "Well, I reckon

Malviny'll get it. What surprises me is that she hasn't already told Miss Mamie about that dream. Or maybe you thought of that dream, Joe, just this minute, and you haven't had time to tell Malviny about it."

"Haw, haw, haw," laughed Joe. "You sho' is a joker, Mr. Will."

"Well, never mind," said Mr. Robertson, "but speaking of jokes, Joe, I just happened to notice how light-complected Mariah and Ella are, when they came out on the porch. You and Malviny are both so black."

"Now, look 'ee hyeer, Mr. Will, you know I can't stand no jokin' 'bout dat. An' den dey ain't so light. Sometimes it jes' happens dat a way wid black folks, anyhow."

"I don't know, Joe, it looks to me like you started with Lucindy, pretty middling black, and then Mariah, lighter, and Ella, not very far from yellow. How do you explain that?"

"Mr. Will, you knows as good as I does dat Malviny's mammy wuz a yaller woman, an' it's jes' come out ag'in in de gals."

"Well, maybe so, Joe, but you'd better keep your eyes open all the same," and Mr. Robertson laughed teasingly.

"Now, look 'ee hyeer, Mr. Will," said Joe as he stood with his hand on the ramshackle gate of his horse-lot, "you knows how I've brung my gals up. I ain't never let 'em work out for nobody. I knows and you knows about dese white men. . . . And Malviny she's been home, too, mighty nigh all de time. Naw, suh, my wimmen folks has got to have charackter, Mr. Will. You knows dat. Look over dar now at John Ramsey's gals. It makes me sick, plumb sick, and him a local preacher, too.

It's true I don't preach in de church. I don't do nuthin' but lecture sometimes at prayer meetin' when de preacher ain't dar, but if one of my gals wuz to carry on like John Ramsey's does, I'd beat her to death. Why can't de white men behave deyselves an' let our wimmen folks alone, we don't—"

"Look out, Joe," said Mr. Robertson sternly. "Stop right there. Get that mule hitched to the plow."

"Yassuh, Mr. Will, I wuzn't gwine to say nuthin'. I was jes' a-thinkin'—"

"Well, don't think. I haven't got time to fool along here all morning. Get a move on you."

Joe caught the mule and led it to where the gear was hanging on the rail fence. "Whoa, mule! whoa, Beck!" he said. "Dis hyeer mule tries to flinch plum across de lot ever time I go to th'ow de back-band 'cross her. She is de out-doin'est mule I ever seed."

"I reckon so, Joe, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Look at that sore on her back."

"Oh, dat ain't much of a so', Mr. Will. Dat little ole so' don't hurt her none. She's jes' mean, dat's whut she is."

"Why, the sore is half as big as my hand. Get a gunnysack and put under that back-band, and bring the mule up to the big house to-night to be doctored."

Joe found an old gunny-sack, put it in place, and at last got the mule hitched to the plow. Mr. Robertson turned his horse and rode away, saying angrily, "These damned niggers will work a mule all day and slip it out and ride it all night." But he added after a pause, "Well, that's just a nigger. They always have done it, the best

of them, and I suppose they always will. But Joe is right. The white men ought to let the nigger women alone. And Joe has certainly done his best by his girls. Ah, well, there's a lot of things to worry about."

CHAPTER IV

On his way to John Ramsey's, Mr. Robertson had to pass by the big house and go down the road in front of it. Just as he came to the big gate opening into the road he was overtaken by Bob riding his horse, Saladin, a very beautiful animal, somewhat larger than medium-sized, a dark bay in color, and gracefully shaped. Mrs. Robertson had named him Saladin, because he must have Arabian blood in him, she said. Mr. Robertson had bought him for Bob two years before from an itinerant horse-trader.

"Hold on, Papa," said Bob, "let me open the gate for you."

Mr. Robertson looked around, saying, "Hello, Bob, have you had your breakfast already?"

"I have that," answered Bob, "and it was a good one. Cindy can beat the world frying chicken, can't she, Papa! And Mama gave me a lot of those new plum preserves with my batter-cakes. You and Mama are mighty good to me, Papa."

"Yes, I expect we spoil you, Bob. But you know, you are your mother's heart."

Bob had skilfully brought his horse alongside of the gate, and now leaned over and deftly opened it. Riding through first, he held the gate open for his father to pass, and then closed it.

"Papa," he said, "you couldn't spare a dollar this morning, could you?"

"Well, son, I reckon so, but dollars are mighty scarce.

What are you going to do, set 'em up to the girls at the soda-fountain?"

"Well, I thought I might see Minnie Deane, and a feller feels mighty bad when he hasn't got a cent in his pocket."

"All right," answered Mr. Robertson, taking out his pocketbook, "here's the dollar. Minnie is a nice girl."

"Thank you, Papa, so long!" And Bob galloped away toward Compton.

"Rides like he was part of the horse," thought Mr. Robertson, as he looked after him. "He's a fine boy, there's no denying that. But, of course, he is not as good as Mamie thinks he is. No boy could be. Now, for John Ramsey."

He rode across the highway to John's gate, which was set back a little way from the road. Two pickaninnies, ragged, grinning, bright yellow in color, raced from John's porch to open the gate, animated by hope for a nickel. But this morning Mr. Robertson passed them up, hardly noticing their presence.

He saw John hastily leaving the porch as if he had a matter of great urgency to attend to somewhere within the house or at the horse-lot in the rear.

"Hold on, John. Where are you going?" he called, loudly.

John stopped midway of the dilapidated hall that was open to the elements at both ends, and half turning around, said, "Lawd, is dat you, Mr. Will? I ain't seed you, I wuz in sich a hurry to git to work. I wuz jes' a-rushin' back to hitch up. But dat's me. I always is in sich a rush a-workin' dat I don't hardly see nobody at all."

Mr. Robertson laughed good-naturedly. "Of all the fancy liars, John, you take the cake. You would have

sat out on that porch until dinner time watching the road, if I hadn't come along. You saw me, but you thought I was going to town with Bob. The only thing that surprised you was that I turned up this way."

"Now, Mr. Will, you discombobulates a man when you argyfies dat a way. I wuz jes' tellin' Rosy las' night dat you sho' is got a keen eye on you. An' dey ain't nobody neenter to think dey kin pull de wool over it, neither."

"How's your crop, John? I have been down to the lower place so much lately that I haven't had a chance to get over here."

"De crop is doin' fine, Mr. Will. Of co'se dey is a few skips in de cotton hyeer an' dar. You know I didn't git de bes' stand 'count of de wet weather, but I sho' is worked to make up for dat. An' cotton is a plant dat reesponds to work."

"Well, if that's all it responds to," said Mr. Robertson, smiling, "yours is bound to answer in a whisper."

"Naw, suh, naw, suh, Mr. Will, my cotton is shoutin' out loud, and my cawn, you ought to see it, my cawn is yellin' come look at me!"

"Well, let's go," answered Mr. Robertson. "Saddle up something and come along."

They went to the horse-lot, and John threw an old worn-out saddle on the back of a flea-bitten, bony gray mare, mounted, and they rode toward the field.

"John, why don't you feed your work animals?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"I feeds 'em, I feeds 'em good all de time," answered John, "but you know, Mr. Will, my part of de cawn from las' year is runnin' low, an' we got to save some of it for bread. But dis hyeer ole mare kin eat an' eat an' eat, an' she don't git no fatter. She reminds me of de

locustes in de Scripter. Dey et up ever' thing dey wuz in de Promised Land—an' whut do de Good Book say?—It don't say nuthin' about a single fat locust anywhar 'round Jerusalem, nor yet in de bound'ry lines of Jericho."

"You've been selling that corn. That's what you've been doing," said Mr. Robertson. "And I'm getting tired of it. I'm going to drive you off of the place if you don't quit starving your stock."

But just then they passed through a skirt of high blood-weeds and willow bushes that grew along a small branch and that had hitherto hid John's crop from sight. When Mr. Robertson's eye fell on the corn, he said, angrily, "What on earth do you mean, John? The cockle-burrs are taking that corn. Here we have had two weeks of good weather, and you haven't struck a lick of work."

"Lawd, Mr. Will, I done laid dat cawn by mos' three weeks ago. I wuz de fust hand on de place to lay my cawn by."

"Well, you are going to be the first hand on the place to get in it again and chop those burrs and plow out the middles. You begin on that this morning. You hear me!"

"Yassuh, of co'se I'll chop 'em out if you say so, Mr. Will, but dem burrs don' hurt nuthin'. You know it's natchul for cuckle-burrs to grow up in cawn you done laid by, Mr. Will, and dey shades de roots of de cawn."

"Shut up!" said Mr. Robertson. "That corn won't make ten bushels to the acre. Come on, and let's see your cotton."

John followed meekly with apprehension and calculation in his eye. They rode in silence. When they came to the cotton field, Mr. Robertson exclaimed, "God

a'mighty, look at that cotton, all run away with the grass! I'm a mind to break your infernal neck. What do you mean by it?"

"Why, Mr. Will, dat little ole grass! Dat ain't nuthin'. Me an' de chillun'll git dat out of dar befo' you kin say boo-shuckins. We wuz jes' layin' off to git into dat cotton to-day."

"Joe's cotton is nearly clean," said Mr. Robertson, "and I don't see why you can't keep up with him at least."

"If I had de force Brother Williams's got, I'd ha' had dat cotton clean long befo' now," answered John.

"What's the matter with your force? You've got as many as Joe has."

"Waal, suh, you know, Mr. Will, dat de mos' of my chillun is small, all my boys is little an' Rosy, my oldest gal, she, she—"

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's gwine to have another baby, Mr. Will."

"Oh, the devil!" said Mr. Robertson, "didn't your other daughter—what's her name?—Oh, Sally. She is the one who had a baby in the winter and it died?"

"Yassuh, she had one."

"And neither one of them is married."

"Naw, suh, dey ain't married yit."

"And you a preacher! Can't you bring your children up better than that?"

"De Lawd gives an' de Lawd takes away, Mr. Will, an'—"

"Who's the daddy of Rosy's baby?"

"I don't know, suh, but she say it mus' be Mr. Hiram Shorter. She say she's 'most sho' it's Mr. Hiram Shorter."

"So that's how it is! But I reckon there's no stopping it. All of you are so trifling and lazy and poor. Why don't you work and make something?"

"We works all de time, Mr. Will, but it looks like we can't never git ahead none. An' you knows gals will be gals, an' dey boun' to have some ribbons and things."

Mr. Robertson threw up his hand in exasperation. "Well," he said, "get the rest of 'em down here to chopping out that cotton, and you go to work on the corn."

Dejectedly he turned his horse to ride back to the big house, leaving John gazing at the cotton patch and scratching his head as if trying to figure out where to begin work on it.

CHAPTER V

It was ten o'clock when Mr. Robertson reached home. The sun was shining hot and no breath of air was stirring. Over the fields was a shimmer of heat waves, and the katydids were singing their strident song of summer.

"Phew! it's hot," he said, "but maybe this weather will stun the boll-weevils a little. That's some comfort anyhow."

He went into the house through the back porch, took a drink of water from the bucket that was hung there on a wire from the ceiling, mopped his face with a handkerchief, walked into the hall where Mrs. Robertson was sitting, shelling black-eyed peas, and said, "These trifling niggers will be the death of me yet. John Ramsey's crop is in an awful shape."

"Well," said Mrs. Robertson, "John's crop was never in any other shape, was it?"

"No, but it is worse even than usual."

"I've been telling you to get rid of John all of the time. Why do you let him stay on?"

"Oh, I don't know, he seems to have such a hard time with his women folks and one thing another, I haven't just had the heart to drive him away. And then he's a good nigger, never spoke a disrespectful word to me in his life, and," he added with a smile, "as a grave digger he can't be beat."

"A hard time with his women folks!" said Mrs. Robertson. "Why, his girls have as good clothes as I have, and his wife, too. They ought to be run out of the county.

And he lives off of them and off of you. He never makes any crop. And I hope we don't want any graves dug soon, and besides he makes dumb Handy, his helper, do almost all the real work about digging a grave."

"Now, now, Mamie, you know his women folks haven't as good clothes as yours."

"Well, they look as good, but of course a nigger looks dressed up in clothes that would look shabby on a white person. But how much finer they dress than Joe's girls! I can't stand 'em. And as for John, he's a lazy, good-for-nothing palaverer. That's what he is."

"Oh, you forget, Mamie, John's a minister of the gospel," said Mr. Robertson, laughing.

"How can you laugh about that, Will? You ought to be ashamed."

"Oh, well, I don't suppose anybody takes a nigger preacher seriously," he answered.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Robertson. "I think Joe Williams is really a good man."

"Yes, but Joe is not a preacher, though."

"Well, there's Uncle Sam Sparkins, down on the lower place. He's a good, humble Christian."

"Yes, I reckon Uncle Sam's all right. And his boys are good workers. I don't think I ever saw a nicer crop than Bill's, his oldest boy. It's as clean as your hand, and well worked from start to finish."

"Well, I am glad to hear there's one good crop somewhere."

"Oh, taken by and large, the crops are not so bad. John Ramsey's is the only one that looks hopeless."

"If I live to see the end of this year, John Ramsey has got to get off of this place," said Mrs. Robertson, determinedly.

"Yes, I reckon it would be best to get rid of him," answered Mr. Robertson. "But what's Bob up to this morning? He touched me for a dollar at the big gate."

"He said he was going to town. And I think he wanted to buy Minnie Deane a pound of candy."

"He didn't say a word to me about college. How does he feel about that?"

"He's overjoyed at the idea of going. He is such an ambitious boy, Will. He told me he was so thankful to think that he was going to get to go. He looks more like you every day, Will."

"Well, I don't know. I certainly haven't been very ambitious, or, at least, I have accomplished mighty little," said Mr. Robertson, sighing.

"Oh, Will, you know you married so young, the first year after you had finished at college, and since that time it has been a fight with poor land and trifling niggers and bad seasons and boll-weevils and army worms and what not, and I know you have done it all for me, honey."

"No, no, Mamie, I ought to have done far better."

"And there's the mortgage on the lower place, too, that has been running all this time. And after all we never needed such a big house as we built with that money. We were foolish young things, Will, and didn't know."

"No, honey, we didn't know. And, by the way, this is June, ain't it? And the semi-annual interest is coming due again next month. I'll have to borrow some money from the bank to pay it with."

"And the bank charges ten per cent., don't it, Will?"

"Yes, but it won't have to be but for ninety days, and the crops will be in by that time; so we can pay it back. It looks like we ought to have enough money without borrowing, but in 1915, you remember, the storm

destroyed the crops. It took all we could make in 1916 to pay those losses. 1917 and '18 were drought years and we made no corn. The high price of cotton pulled us through, but in 1918 we bought the automobile and that took all of our surplus. 1919 was the flood year, and we made nothing, and you know what happened to us last year. We had a wet spring and had to plant three times to get a stand. The seed rotted in the ground. That made our crop late, and by the time we could get it on the market, the price had fallen below the cost of production."

"Yes, yes, I know, Will, farming is a hopeless business, anyway, isn't it?"

Bob came in bringing the mail. His face was bright and animated, his gray eyes dancing and his blond hair rumpled, as he took off his hat.

"Here's the mail, Papa," he said. "I tell you I had a time with Saladin. He came mighty near to stepping on a big water-moccasin in the road, and I thought for a minute he was going to get the best of me and run away, he was so scared. Ha! ha! ha! he did run and pitch."

"I wonder what that old rascal of a snake was doing out in the road this time of day, hot as it is," said Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, Will, what difference does that make? Just think, Bob might have been killed! Bob, honey, are you sure you are not hurt?" exclaimed Mrs. Robertson.

"Shuckins! Mama, I am not a baby," said Bob.

"What did you do with the horse?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"I hitched him in the shade out in front. I had an idea I'd ride over to the big pasture and see how that yearling

is getting along that I doctored for the screw-worms yesterday."

"Not in this heat, Bob," said Mrs. Robertson, "it is enough to give you a sunstroke. Wait till the cool of the evening."

"Oh, Mama, you think I'm made out of—"

"Mind your mother, Bob," said Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, all right. I'll call Cyrus then to put up the horse."

"No, you will have to put him up yourself. Cyrus went early this morning down to the lower place to carry some wire to fix up the fence. The cattlemen have been cutting the fence down there again, and the cattle were getting into Uncle Sam Sparkins's crop. I don't know what we are going to do about those fellers always cutting our fences."

"Well, they have been at it for twenty years to my certain knowledge," said Mrs. Robertson, "and we never have done anything yet except fix the fence up again."

"That's pretty near true," said Mr. Robertson. "But what can you do? Sim Senter asked me to let him lie in wait with a shotgun and shoot 'em."

"That's what I'd do, Papa," said Bob.

"No," answered Mr. Robertson, "what would happen, if anything, is that some poor nigger would get shot. The white men are not going around at night cutting fences themselves. You know that. They get some nigger to do the actual cutting."

"Well, why not shoot the feller that does the actual cutting?" asked Bob. "If a few of 'em were shot, it would be mighty hard for anybody to get a nigger to cut fences after that."

"Oh, Papa is always so tender-hearted about niggers," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Well," answered Mr. Robertson, "I always feel somehow that the poor things can't help themselves. I get mad at 'em, they'd make a saint mad, but after all, they are so ignorant and childish and—"

"And they impose on you all the time, and always have," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Well, that's an old subject," said Mr. Robertson, "and I don't suppose we'll break any new ground on that this morning. Run along, Bob, and put up your horse." He opened the morning paper that was printed in their nearest city, and immersed himself in its columns.

Bob decided to lead Saladin through the yard to the horse-lot in the rear, instead of riding around the fence, as the horse had fidgeted about until he had gotten out of the shade, and the sun had made the saddle too hot to sit on comfortably.

As he passed, the cook was standing in the kitchen door, blowing, and fanning herself with the end of her kitchen apron. She was black and fat, and the sweat was running in little shining streams down her pudgy cheeks. She was a woman of about thirty-five.

"Hello, Cindy, what are you going to have for dinner?" asked Bob.

"Roas' beef," said Cindy in a tone of great scorn, "dat's de main thing. I sho' does hate dat roas' beef. It looks like Mr. Will never kin git enough roas' beef."

"Oh, roast beef is good with the kind of gravy you make," said Bob.

"Naw, honey, gim'me hog meat, gim'me hog meat eve'y time. I put a big piece of bacon in wid de black-

eyed peas, an' dat's whut I'm gwine to git. Naw, suh, I ain't gwine to be lef', not if I knows myse'f," and she laughed with a tumultuous shaking of her fat sides and breasts.

Bob smiled and said, "Anybody could look at you Cindy, and tell you never have been left when it comes to eating."

"Naw, suh, we's hyeer to-day, and whar is we to-morrer, honey? Haw, haw, haw, dat's it, whar is we to-morrer?"

Bob went on, leaving Cindy to the enjoyment of her own wit. As he was unsaddling his horse in front of the barn, Ella, Joe Williams's youngest girl, came through the lot.

"Hello, Ella, where are you going?" asked Bob.

"Jus' up to de big house to borry a little salt," she said. "Mama's run plum out of salt, and she sent me up to see if I couldn't borry a little from Miss Cindy. But dey do tell me, Mr. Bob, dat you're goin' to college."

"Yes, that's what they say," answered Bob.

"Dat sho wuz a pretty medal dey give you over to de high school, Mr. Bob, but I ain't never had no chance to see it right close."

"Here it is," said Bob, running his hand into his pocket. "Do you want to look at it?"

"I suttinly does," said Ella, reaching out her brown, shapely hand, like those of so many colored women seemingly not susceptible to coarsening by toil.

Bob put the medal in her upturned palm. "It's gold, ain't it, Mr. Bob, sho' 'nuff gold?"

"Yes, it's real gold," said Bob, smiling.

"And ain't it bright? And it's got writin' on it. Lemme see, it says you got de highest grade of any of de pupils. It sho' is nice to be smart dat a way, Mr. Bob."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob proudly, "maybe I just had better luck."

"Nunck-unh, Mr. Bob, you're jes' like Mr. Will. You won't never take nuthin' to yo'se'f. All de folks say Mr. Will won't never take nuthin' good to hisse'f. All of us knows you is de smartest boy dey is. But dis sho' is a pretty medal."

"Bob! Bob!" Mrs. Robertson's voice was heard calling, "dinner is ready."

Ella handed the medal back, and Bob left hurriedly for dinner.

As he came in, his father asked, "What were you doing out in the lot so long, Bob? Did you have any trouble with Saladin?"

"No, Papa, Ella came along, and I was just showing her my medal."

Mr. Robertson looked at him keenly, as they took their seats at the table, then said, "I don't think I'd be showing my medal around to niggers."

"Oh, there's no harm in that, Will," said Mrs. Robertson. "Naturally Bob is proud of his medal."

"Let me manage this," said Mr. Robertson with unexpected heat, and Mrs. Robertson said no more.

They finished the meal with little more conversation, though Bob tried to liven things up by telling what Cindy had said about the bacon.

All that afternoon the look his father had given him hung in Bob's mind. And that night he saw again in his dreams Ella's yellowish palm and the bright medal lying in it glistening in the sun.

CHAPTER VI

Bob was up for six o'clock breakfast with his father and mother next morning.

"Well, Bob," said Mr. Robertson, "you're the early bird, what's the worm?"

"I really must go over to the big pasture to see about that yearling, and I thought I'd go before it gets hot, Papa, if you don't want me to go to town for the mail."

"No, I am going to town myself. I want to see Mr. Hiram Shorter about John Ramsey's account. John's crop is so bad that I don't want him to run any big account."

"Will, dear, I wish you would go in the car. Sister Maxcy told me she wanted to come and spend the day, and you can bring her out," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, my Lord," said Mr. Robertson. "Brother Maxcy is a good man, but that woman nearly talks me to death."

"Now, Will, we haven't had either of them here for a month," answered Mrs. Robertson.

"No, honey, that's all right, I'll get her."

When Mr. Robertson drove up to the general store of Thompson & Co., Mr. Hiram Shorter was standing in the front door, in his shirt-sleeves, and smiling expansively. He was head-clerk, bookkeeper and general manager. In fact he was the only clerk, except on Saturdays and around Christmas. Henry Thompson,

the proprietor, spent most of his time in fishing and in riding after his cattle that ran loose on the range.

"Good morning, Mr. Robertson, come in," he said in cheery tones.

"Good morning, Mr. Hiram, I thought I'd drop by to see about John Ramsey's account. Will you please look it up for me. His crop's mighty poor."

"John's not much on the work, is he, Mr. Robertson?"

"No, he is the triflingest nigger I've got."

"Well, I hear you'll probably get rid of him at the end of this year anyhow?"

"How's that?"

"Oh, I heard he was going to move to Randy Shallow's place this coming year."

"Who told you that?"

Mr. Hiram flushed a little. "Oh, I don't just remember," he said. "Somebody or other was telling me."

"Couldn't have been Rosy, I reckon?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"Well, that's a good one," said Mr. Hiram, flushing redder still, "but you know about Randy Shallow and Sally, looks like he wants her nearer to hand," and Mr. Hiram laughed.

"It'll be a good riddance for me," answered Mr. Robertson. "I've just let John hang on year after year, because he said he couldn't get any other place, and then he is such a promiser."

They had come to the standing-desk at the rear of the store, where the books were kept. Mr. Hiram turned to John Ramsey's account, added up a column of figures and said, "Oh, it's not bad, only about a hundred dollars."

"No, that's not so bad, he may be able to pay out at that rate. But I nearly always have to pay something for him at the end of every year."

"There's one thing certain," said Mr. Hiram, "we wouldn't run him if you didn't stand for him. He is so trifling. But I've been holding him down like you told me. I haven't let him have near all he wanted."

"That's right. Much obliged," said Mr. Robertson. "But they tell me, Mr. Hiram, that you've been setting up to the little widow that sings in the choir with you. It will be funny to see you a married man after all these years."

"No, there's nothing to that," answered Mr. Hiram, flushing his reddest. "You know I never have been able to marry, and I can't afford it now. But Henry Thompson asked me to speak to you about that little farm he had to take for a bad debt. You know it's just a little ways east of your place, over there by Uncle Peter Higgins's and the nigger church. Sam Smither turned it in on his debt here last year. And Henry says if you'd like to buy it, he'd take fifteen hundred dollars for it, a little cash and plenty of time on the balance. There's about fifty acres of it and a pretty good house."

"Yes, I know. Well, that's a pretty good buy, but as you know, I'm short of cash now. Still, you may tell Henry that I'll think about it and let him know."

"All right, thank you, Mr. Will."

Mr. Robertson went out of the store thinking, "Well, there *is* something to that. He never has been able to marry on his small salary. If the Shorters hadn't lost all their land, it might have been different. And Mr. Hiram is a good sort of fellow, easy-going, good-natured

and generous, too generous for his own good. If it wasn't for him, Henry Thompson wouldn't have much business, that's a cinch. But judging people is a bad business, anyway. Who knows, if it hadn't been for the land that was left me, and Mamie—"

He found Sister Maxcy ready and waiting on the parsonage porch. She was a spry woman, if somewhat fat, and punctuality was one of her principal virtues. She was a great talker. The Baptists called her a gossip, but the Methodists stood up for her valiantly in any interdenominational parley, as her husband was the Methodist minister. In talking strictly among themselves, however, the Methodists were not quite so loyal.

All of the way to the farm her monologue held on continually, except when Mr. Robertson felt it absolutely incumbent on him to say, "Yes'm" or "No'm" or "I'll declare!" She had told Brother Maxcy that she liked Mr. Robertson best of all the stewards, because he was such a good listener.

Mr. Robertson's thoughts were still running on Mr. Hiram Shorter. And in his mind was a clear picture of Mr. Hiram's short, pudgy figure, and kindly, if somewhat sensual, face. And it came to him how animated and boyish was the face of the shabby man of forty-four when he would talk about his heroes of fiction, of whom David Harum was his favorite, for Mr. Hiram was a reader of novels as well as a singer in the Methodist choir. "And ever since I've known him, everybody has called him '*Mister* Hiram,' never plain 'Hiram' nor 'Shorter,' while nobody but the niggers calls his boss anything except 'Hen' or 'Henry.' And how cheerfully he volunteered for the war, although he never did get

across the sea! And I don't know what we would do about burying people if it wasn't for him," ran Mr. Robertson's thoughts.

When they reached the house, Mrs. Robertson, after greeting Sister Maxcy, said, "Will, Madison Mulberry is here to see you from the lower place."

"Well, let him wait till after dinner," answered Mr. Robertson, "I'm going to read the paper now out on the front porch, and let you and Sister Maxcy have a good talk."

In the big pasture at the north end of the farm Bob was sitting on a fallen log, in the shade of an elm tree, fanning himself with his hat. "My, that was a hot job," he said.

It had taken him some time to find the yearling, which had gone off to itself in a clump of bushes. And then he had discovered that the animal needed to be doctored again, so he had to drive it out into the open, rope it, and tie its feet before he could put the chresyllic ointment and cotton into the sore that the worms had made. Saladin had not been well trained as a cow-pony, so it was a troublesome business for Bob to manage it all by himself.

As he sat on the log he thought, "Sister Maxcy is talking Mama's ear off, I know, and I don't care if I don't get back till dinner time. I believe I'll take a dip in the swimmin' hole."

John Ramsey's field was separated from the pasture by the railroad, and near where the latter crossed Berry Creek, the western boundary of the farm, the stream widened into a large hole of water that was deep enough for swimming. It was only a short distance from where

Bob was sitting, so he hitched Saladin to a convenient sapling, walked to the creek, slipped off his clothes, and plunged in.

"Unh, this feels good," he said, as he dived and lunged and splashed about. "I'll swim from this end of the pool and back again, just to see if I can do it."

He swam noisily lifting his feet out of the water with their every stroke, so the "Chunk! Chunk" of his progress could be heard at a distance on the calm summer morning.

Sally was hoeing in John Ramsey's cotton field. She raised her head, listening for a moment, then dropped her hoe, crawled through the right-of-way fence, and began to climb the railroad dump. One of John's small boys who was working in the field with her, cried out, "Where're you goin', Sally?"

She turned, motioned, "Sh!" to him with her finger across her lips, surmounted the dump and descended into the bushes on the other side.

The boy's first impulse was to yell, "Pappy, pappy," to John, who was working in the near-by cornfield, "Sally's done dropped her hoe and gone off." But on second thought he reflected, "Nunck-unh, maybe I'll git somep'n ner out of Sally for keepin' quiet."

Bob swam around and splashed about for a few minutes till he was cool, and then came out of the water and sat down on the grass in a shady spot to dry off somewhat before putting on his clothes again. As he sat there, by some chance his mind began to run on Minnie Deane. "I wonder if she really likes me," he thought. "A feller never can tell. But, my-oh-my, what if she knew I was sitting here this a way thinking about her!"

He blushed at the idea, and hastened to dress.

As he rode across the railway and entered the cotton-field, Sally was at the near end of a row, hoeing away industriously, her back turned to Bob, but she was singing as if to herself:

"I went across de railroad track
I went across de railroad track
And I couldn't hardly come back
And I couldn't hardly come back
'Cause whut did I see?
'Cause whut did I see?"

At her first words Bob had halted Saladin, partly out of curiosity and partly because he liked to hear Negroes sing at their work.

Then, "The slut!" he said to himself, and rode on without giving any sign that he had heard her, but with a disquieting mixture in his mind of shame and anger and something else.

As he was coming into the house, his father, sitting on the porch, asked him, "Son, did you see any of John's folks in the field when you passed by?"

"Yes, Papa, John was working in the corn, and two or three of his little boys were chopping out the cotton."

"Wasn't either of the girls there?"

"Yes, I believe one of 'em was, now that I come to think about it."

"Sally, I reckon," said Mr. Robertson.

"Yes, I think it was Sally," said Bob.

His father resumed his reading, and Bob went on into the house, wondering why he hadn't said outright at first that it was Sally.

As he passed the sitting-room door, his mother called to him. "Son, come and speak to Sister Maxcy."

Bob stood in the doorway and said, "Good morning,

Sister Maxcy, I hope you and Brother Maxcy are well."

"Yes, thank you, we are well, but my! what a big young man you've gotten to be. Come in and let me get a good look at you. I expect I'll have to begin calling you Mister Bob soon."

"I was just going upstairs to change my clothes," said Bob, "I'm a sight. I got powerful dirty out in the pasture wrestling with that yearling."

"Yes, son, I expect you had better run along and change," said his mother, to Bob's great relief.

As he left, Sister Maxcy resumed her discourse where it was interrupted by his appearance. "Yes, as I was a-saying, Mister Maxcy is always making excuses for people. I say a sinner is a sinner and they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Why, just look around you, mighty near all of the young people gone to dancing and card-playing, and ten divorces in the county at the last term of court. Why, they tell me that some of the official members let card-playing go on right in their houses, and—"

"Well, not in this house," said Mrs. Robertson.

"No, no, honey, of course not. I know that all of this household have been gloriously saved and rest in the Lord, but there's Brother Watkins and Brother Samuel Deane. True, Jasper Deane, his brother, Minnie's father, is very different and strict enough. But Brother Watkins and Samuel Deane—what do you say to them?—and just think of Mr. Hiram Shorter, he's not an official member, I know, but think of him sitting up there singing in the choir!"

"But maybe all of those stories about him are not true. He certainly is a mighty nice man, and Will thinks a lot of him," interjected Mrs. Robertson.

"True?" exclaimed Sister Maxcy, "true? What about Rosy Ramsey? Everybody knows about that. It is the common talk of the town, and there he stands a-smirking and a-smiling and a-carrying on with all of the women, white and black, that come into the store."

"Now, Sister Maxcy, isn't 'carrying on' a little strong? I go into the store, and he doesn't carry on with me. But what about Rosy?"

"Haven't you heard, and the thing right here under your nose, Sister Robertson! Well, John Ramsey is going to be a grand-daddy again mighty soon, and who's responsible? Tell me that. Everybody knows it's no other than *Mister* Hiram Shorter, the singer in our choir. And what do you reckon Mister Maxcy says, and him a preacher of the gospel and my husband, why, he says you must always try to understand the *why* and maybe then you can forgive the sin and love the sinner. But no, not me, I'm not going around loving sinners, and God don't forgive 'em unless they repent and forsake their evil ways, why should I be expected to forgive 'em?"

"But what does Brother Maxcy say about Mr. Hiram?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"He says understand the *why*. And the *why* is that Mr. Hiram Shorter comes of good people that have lost their money and he is easy-going and has always worked for a small salary and he never has had the heart to ask a white woman to marry him and sacrifice the way she would have to sacrifice, and so—. But I tell him, didn't I sacrifice now, and then he says people are different, and I say, well, why couldn't he go on just being a bachelor like St. Paul or somebody, and he says mind what he tells me, Mr. Hiram Shorter will give his heart to God yet and become a good Christian, and the thing

to do is not to drive him out of the choir, because maybe that's the very thing that's going to lead him to salvation. Think of old Hiram Shorter singing his way to salvation on Sunday and prayer-meeting night, and where is he other nights? Tell me that. It makes me sick. And what if my folks were always poor, what has that got to do with it? Why does Mr. Maxcy have to tell me that?"

"Maybe he means, dear," said Mrs. Robertson, "that probably you wouldn't understand so well what Mr. Hiram would think a wife ought to have. You know, honey, it's no disgrace to be poor, and maybe it's something like that he means."

"There you go, Sister Robertson, taking up for that Mister Hiram, like all the other women—"

"No, no, honey, I just mean to say that Brother Maxcy is a mighty good man, and—"

"Good! yes, he's good enough. But did you ever think, Sister Robertson, what it means to live twenty years with a man that everybody is always saying about him, he is a saint?"

"No, I couldn't say that I have," answered Mrs. Robertson. "Will is a good man, but of course he gets mad sometimes and sometimes maybe he tells me fibs, and—"

"And there, that's just it," said Sister Maxcy, "you get some relief. Sometimes I feel like being desperately wicked just because I get so tired of hearing people say Brother Maxcy is a mighty good man. And then folks don't understand me, and they say I'm a vixen and a gossip, and all sorts of things. And I love Mr. Maxcy, too. But what do you reckon he says about Henry Thompson that owns the store?"

"I don't know. What does he say?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"Well, he says the root of his sin is that he is bashful, just bashful. Says inwardly he is the shyest man he ever knew and has the lowest opinion of himself. I should think he ought to have the lowest opinion of himself, living openly with that nigger woman, the black, brazen thing, with a yard full of Henry Thompson's children, and flaunting around that store like she was as good as any white lady in town. But Mr. Maxcy says Henry Thompson started out with being so bashful and having such a contempt for himself that he didn't dare to raise his eyes to a white woman, that what he needed was encouragement and heartening up, and that he didn't get it, and so he just drifted into the ways of the baser sort around him and got in worse and deeper on account of his very bashfulness. Now, what do you think of that!"

"I tell you, I hate to say it again, Sister Maxcy, but that makes me believe Brother Maxcy must be a mighty good man," said Mrs. Robertson, smiling.

"Yes, I tell him he thinks with his heart instead of his head, and a mighty soft heart it is," said Sister Maxcy, "and that's the reason why he never has, in all these years, got a real good appointment. Why plenty of preachers that haven't got his education are holding down big city pulpits in this very Conference right now. And where is he? Always stuck out in the country, where his wife has to speak to such people as that low-down Henry Thompson and listen to Mr. Hiram Shorter sing in the choir!"

Sister Maxcy's indignation might have led her into some extreme, if black Cindy had not stuck her head in

the door and said, "Miss Mamie, kin you come hyeer a minute?"

Mrs. Robertson excused herself and went out with Cindy to see about some final touches to the midday meal. And Sister Maxcy picked up her sewing again, pushing the needle into the cloth with little dabs that were almost vicious.

CHAPTER VII

After dinner was finished and the ladies had gone upstairs for their afternoon nap, Mr. Robertson went to the back porch to find out what Madison Mulberry wanted. Madison talked loudly and positively and had rather a savage look, indeed it was said that there was some Indian blood in his veins. He had the reputation of being "a bad nigger," but he was a pretty good worker, and as he was living on the lower place when Mr. Robertson inherited it, and always seemed to have had a genuine affection for Mr. Robertson's father, Mr. Robertson had put up with much annoyance from him and allowed him to stay.

"Well, Madison," he asked, "have you had your dinner?"

"Yassuh, Mr. Will, Sister Cindy give me some black-eyed peas and cawn-bread," said Madison scornfully.

"Look'ee hyeer, nigger," broke in Cindy from the kitchen door, "you ain't sayin' nuthin' 'bout dat bacon you et up away from me and Cyrus, an' dat whole slab of peach pie."

"Waal, I believe dey wuz a smidget of bacon an' a thumbnail of pie," admitted Madison ungraciously.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Cyrus vociferously, who was standing on the porch near Cindy.

"There, that will do, Cindy," said Mr. Robertson, "and Cyrus, you go on and get to work in that melon patch."

Cindy turned into the kitchen muttering, "I ain't gwine

to have no low-down, cawn-fiel' nigger a-lyin' 'bout me."

"That will do, Cindy," Mr. Robertson repeated, "and now, Madison, what do you want?"

"I wants some money, dat's whut I wants."

"What do you want money for?"

"Waal, you knows, Mr. Will, de Juneteenth is mighty nigh hyeer. An' I ain't got a frazzlin' cent."

"It's over a week till the nineteenth, and if I were to give you any money, you would spend it before that time and be asking for more."

"My ole 'ooman say she got to have a new dress, an' she got to have time to make it. She ain't got nuthin' to wear to de celebration."

"Where is the celebration going to be this year, Madison? The nineteenth comes on Sunday anyway."

"John Ramsey say he gwine to git up a celebration an' have it on Saturday an' ax you for de little paschur' to have it in."

"Well, he hasn't said anything to me about it."

"Naw, suh, but he is gwine to. He said you wuz sorter mad de las' time he seed you."

"I was. It was enough to make anybody mad. I tell you what I'll do, Madison, I'll give you a note to Mr. Hiram Shorter, telling him to let your old woman have the materials for a dress."

"And no money? Ain't you gwine to gim'me no money?"

"Well, you know you came out behind last year, and I want to hold you down, so you will at least come out even this year if you can."

"Waal, tell me dis, wouldn't I come out if it hadn't ha' been for dat ar ten per cent.? Jes' tell me dat? I knows all about dat ten per cent. de sto'-keepers adds on

for de landlords. You can't fool me, Mr. Will, nunck-unh, you can't fool me."

"I'm not trying to fool you, and I think maybe you would have just about come out if it hadn't been for that ten per cent. But do you think I'm going to stand good for all you niggers for nothing?"

"Waal, don't you git de rent, a fo'th of de cotton and a third of de cawn? Whut do you call dat?"

"I call that impudence, that's what I call it. You get out of here and get quick. Find you some other place to live on. You don't get anything from me." And Mr. Robertson walked into the house.

"Papa," said Bob, who was sitting in the hall as Mr. Robertson came in, "oughtn't you to hit him over the head with a scantling? Let me, I'll go out there and beat him up."

"Shut up," said Mr. Robertson angrily. "When I need your advice or help I'll call on you. Go upstairs, and go to sleep."

Bob, crestfallen, began to mount the stairs, and Mr. Robertson walked testily into the sitting-room, where for some moments he paced back and forth excitedly. Then he dropped into a chair at his desk and sat with drawn brows, thinking, "It must be that I am afraid of Madison, afraid of a nigger! I could take a gun and go over there to-morrow and kill him or beat him up. I wonder if that don't explain why many niggers—and white men, too—are shot. The shooter is scared, the one shot is the stronger man. Anyhow, I've got to go over there to-morrow, and I've got to take Bob with me.

"Or it may be that I think the ten per cent. is wrong and that makes a coward out of me. Well, yes, that may be. But every year some of them come out behind,

and if it wasn't for the ten per cent. where would I be? But that's really putting a penalty on the good workers to make up for the laziness of the shiftless. There's no disguising that. Well, I'll talk it over with Mamie and maybe with Brother Maxcy."

"Bob!" he called, "Bob! Let's go fishing."

"All right, Papa," cried Bob, delighted, and came rushing down the stairs. He had been sitting in his room trying to reconcile his idea of his father's heroism with the incident he had just witnessed. And he had been having trouble. But now the thing would be explained.

As he reached the foot of the stairway, his father said, "Come on, let's get the tackle. Your mother said she wanted to drive into town this evening, so she can take Sister Maxcy home."

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN RAMSEY was waking up his oldest boy, aged thirteen, who was taking a noon-day nap on the uneven boards of the porch floor. "Git up, Tom, git up," he was saying, "we got to go to de fiel'. Come on, all you chillun."

"But it's so hot, Pappy," said Tom, "less wait a while."

"Git up from dar," said John, "you lazy hound!"

"Whut's de rush, Papa?" asked Sally from where she leaned back in a chair against the wall.

"We all got to git de crop cleaned out good if we gwine to git Mr. Will to loan me de little paschur for de celebration."

"Oh, you know he ain't gwine to loan it to no low-down, triflin' nigger like you is," said Liza, his wife, an emaciated mulatto with the curious sort of pallor on her face that consumptive Negroes show.

"Why don't you ax Mr. Joe Williams to ax him for you?" said Rosy. "Mr. Will'll do mighty nigh anything for Mr. Williams."

"Hunh, dat ain't so bad, Rosy. I believes I will speak to Brother Williams about de matter. Me an' him kin put our heads togedder an' solve de problem."

"Solve yo' foot," said Liza. "You ain't never solved nuthin' yit."

"Jes' watch me," said Sally, "I'll git Mr. Bob to git him to loan it to us."

"Hunh, Mr. Bob wouldn't wipe his foot on you," said Rosy.

"Wouldn't, hunh? Well, never you min'. I seen Mr. Bob dis mawnin' an' he seen me," said Sally, tittering.

"You seen him ride thoo de fiel', dat's how you seen him."

"Well, nemmine," retorted Sally, "I knows whut I knows, an' it's somep'n you ain't gwine to find out."

"Whut you gim'me, Sally, not to tell?" asked Tom.

"Shut up yo' mouth, Tom, you don't know nuthin'." But Sally made a private sign to him.

"Git a move on you," said Liza, "all of you. You got to git dat crop clean. Dat's de bes' an' de onliest way to git de loan of dat paschur, an' we boun' to have dat celebration. Some other nigger'll git ahead of us if we don't send de word around pretty quick." But there was another hope in her eyes as she looked at Sally.

"Waal, why can't you come out dar an' he'p us, sorter loan us yo' assistance?" asked John.

"Whut! in dis hot sun!" exclaimed Liza. "Nigger, you know I been too po'ly for de longes' to 'spose myse'f to de sun."

"You ain't been too po'ly to 'spose yose'f to de moonshine," said John with some spirit.

"Waal, come on," said Sally, "an' less git at it."

"Pappy," asked Tom, "ain't dis de 'mancipation celebration."

"Dat's whut it is," answered John.

"Waal, how come it—"

"Waal, you see all of us cullud people used to be slaves 'long fo' de war. An' some of dem white folks up nawth, dey got tired of seein' we all b'longin' to our white folks, 'cause dey say dey ain't treatin' us right, and dey makin' too much money outen us. So Abe Linkum and Gin'ral Grant an' George Washington—

an' I speck Stonewall Jackson wuz dar too—dey got togedder, an' dey say, 'less set de niggers free, dey ain't doin' us no good whar dey is, an' if we sets 'em free, maybe some of 'em will come up nawth an' work for us.' And, 'So mote it be,' said de rest of 'em.

"An' den de mogrification of de niggers sot in, an' kep' agoin', spite of all our white folks down hyeer could do. When you want to know somep'n, son, jes' ax yo' pappy."

"But in de reader at de school house it say de cullud folks wuz sot free in Jinuary. And hyeer we is havin' de celebration in June. How come dat?"

"Waal, you see, our white folks down hyeer dey knowed better'n dat. Dey said, 'No, we ain't gwine to have it in Jinuary, 'cause whut's de use? De niggers can't have no celebration in Jinuary, it's too cold, we gwine to put it in June, so's dey'll be some sense to it."

"But," said Sally, "dat can't be, 'cause I read myse'f dat it wuz in de whole Newnited States at de same time."

"In de Newnited States, yas," answered John, "but you see, Sally, dis hyeer is Texas, an' Texas is mighty diffunt from dem Newnited States."

"Unh-hunh," said Liza, "I been tellin' de chillun all de time dat dis hyeer is Texas."

"Yes," said Rosy, "eve'ybody knows it's Texas, 'ceppin', maybe, Sally, an' she's so smart twell she don't know nuthin'."

"Nemmine," answered Sally, "I knows somep'n you don' know and you ain't gwine to find out."

"Humph!" answered Rosy with a toss of her head.

"But whar we gwine to git de money to buy de 'freshments for dat celebration?" asked Liza.

"Mr. Tony Peters say he'll let me have forty dollars

on my teâm," answered John, "an' you watch me, I'll git ten dollars mo' outen Mr. Will. Dat'll buy a couple of shotes and a yearlin' for de bobbycue, an' it'll leave over plenty for de trimmin's."

"But whut if it rains?" asked Rosy. "It always do rain on Juneteenth."

"Dat's jes' de way of it," said John. "Somebody is always a-th'owin' cold water on eve'ything I does."

Tom broke out in a boisterous laugh.

"Whut's de matter wid you?" asked John, turning on him fiercely.

"Dey sho' will be a-pourin' cold water on it if it rains," said Tom, "haw, haw, haw!"

"Shut up, nigger, I'll bus' you head open wid a swingle-tree." And then he continued in a milder voice, "If it don't rain, I'll sell dem fifty dollars' wuth of reefreshments for mighty nigh a hunderd an' fifty dollars. Dat's whut it is to be smart an' befo-handed!"

"Waal," said Liza, mollified by the bright financial prospect, "git along out to de fiel', all of you, an' if I ain't feelin' too po'ly I'll come out an' he'p you myse'f to'ards de middle of de evenin'."

On the way to the field John said to Sally, "Nunck-unh, Sally, I ain't gwine to cawnsult wid Brother Williams. He's too havin'. De fus' thing I know he'll have dis hyeer celebration for hisse'f, if I say too much to him about it. Dey say he's a power in prayer over to de Babtis' church, but I been studyin' 'bout dat, an' it's 'cause he's tryin' to git so much outen de Lawd. He fair wrastles at de throne of grace a-tryin' to thow sand in de eyes of de Lawd, but he can't fool me, nunck-unh!"

"Dat's whut Rosy said anyhow," answered Sally. "I wouldn't pay no 'tention to it. An' look at dem Wil-

liams gals. Dey turns up dey noses ever time dey see me and Rosy. Nunck-unh, dey's too good! But if some-p'n ner ain't gwine on 'tween dat long, black Babtis' preacher an' Lucindy, den I miss my guess."

"You reckon?" asked John with lively interest.

"I'm mighty nigh sho' of it," answered Sally. "And besides I done started to workin' on Mr. Bob."

"Waal," said John, "we got to start to workin' on dis hyeer fiel' now, an' dat's all dey is to it."

CHAPTER IX

THAT night after Mr. and Mrs. Robertson had retired to their bed-room, he said, "Mamie, I've been thinking about that ten per cent. that the merchants add on to the tenants' accounts for us landlords, and I have been wondering if it is right."

"Goodness alive, Will!" she exclaimed, "you are not thinking of knocking that off, when we need money so badly and are trying to send Bob to college?"

"Well, no, but I've just been wondering if it is right."

"When you begin to wonder if a thing is right, Will, I know what you are getting ready to do. All the other landlords add it on, don't they? And look what you have lost on the niggers as it is. Everybody says that the trouble with you is that you are too good to the hands. And they don't appreciate it. Do they work any better for you than they do for anybody else? No. And you are always giving them something, and knocking off here and making allowance there, until there is mighty little left for us."

"But, Mamie, don't you think it is putting a penalty on the good workers for the laziness of the trifling ones?"

"Oh, it may be. I don't know, but we get little enough as it is. And they ought to pay something to have you stand for them. Why don't you quit standing for them, anyway?"

"Well, I've thought about that," said Mr. Robertson, "but you know they would have the greatest trouble get-

ting any credit at all then. And many times when the crops don't look good, the merchants don't let 'em have half enough to eat. And then there's always trouble in settling up at the end of the year. The merchant wants me to let him have this bale of cotton and that bale of cotton from this tenant and that tenant and everything always gets into a stew. It's simpler when I take all the cotton, pay the merchant what's coming to him, then take out my rent share, and turn the balance over to the tenant."

"Yes, Will dear, I know that, but the effect of it all is that if there is any loss you bear it. You subordinate your landlord's lien to the merchant's account, whereas the law is that the landlord's lien for his rent comes first."

"Yes, that's so, Mamie, but the niggers are so poor and ignorant, and I don't like to see the whole brunt of bad seasons and insects and everything fall on them all the time."

"Oh, Will, Will," she said ready to burst into tears, "must we go on forever stinting and stinting and having so little, just to protect some niggers who don't work half of the time and who won't even drive a staple in a fence-post for us unless we pay 'em twice what it's worth?"

"Most of 'em *are* mighty trifling," said Mr. Robertson. "Especially when it comes to fixing up anything."

"And they could get on if they would work and save and try," said Mrs. Robertson. "Look at Bob Barker and the Washington boys and Uncle Peter Higgins, all niggers, all of 'em, and they own their own places and make good crops nearly every year. And they made it all themselves. They started out as renters. Why can't the others do as well? Because they are so lazy and trifling, that's the whole reason."

"Yes, I reckon you are right," said Mr. Robertson, but there was something in his tone that showed he was not altogether convinced. Late in the night he lay awake pondering.

Next morning at breakfast Mr. Robertson said, "Bob, tell Cyrus to saddle up my horse and Saladin. I want you to go down to the lower place with me this morning."

"All right, Papa," said Bob. "I was sorter counting on going to town this morning, but—"

"Will, you don't need him specially to go with you, do you?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"Yes, I need him very specially," answered her husband.

Riding along the edge of the creek bottom on their way to the lower place Mr. Robertson and Bob passed by the farm of Bob Barker. "You see," said Mr. Robertson, "Bob Barker has a good crop, and it is well worked. He nearly always has a good crop. I've thought about it a whole lot, and it must be because he is working for himself, and not for a landlord. It is a good thing for a man, white or black, to be working for himself on his own land. Bob Barker makes at least twice as much every year as any one of my tenants. It would be the best plan, I think, for all the larger places to be broken up, divided into small farms, and sold to the tenants on easy terms."

"I don't know, Papa," said Bob, "the niggers would own nearly this whole county then, and that wouldn't be a good thing, would it?"

"No, but I believe the county would produce more if every man owned the land that he worked and no more."

"Well, look at Randy Shallow," answered Bob, "he makes his place pay him good money, and why? He stays right with his niggers and drives 'em all day long—and they do say he stays lots of nights, too," he ended with a snigger.

"Bob, I am surprised at you," said Mr. Robertson. "That's the shame of this whole county. And one of the reasons why I want to send you to college is so that you may prepare yourself for some profession that will enable you to shake the dust of it off of your feet."

"There's no danger of that sort of thing with me," said Bob.

"Well, son, I'm mighty glad to hear it, and I hope there never will be."

When they reached the lower place, they rode straight to the shack of Madison Mulberry, whom they found just starting out to work.

"Good morning, Madison," said Mr. Robertson.

"Good mawnin', Mr. Will."

"Stop, I want to talk to you."

"Whut you gwine to say to me, Mr. Will?"

"Hold your mouth, and listen. Yesterday, you came and asked me for some money. You asked me in such a way that I couldn't have given it to you if I had wanted to. You've got the name of a bad nigger, and I suppose you thought you'd bluff me."

"Naw, suh, Mr. Will, I wuz jes'—"

"Hold on till I get through. Did you ever shoot a man, Madison?"

"Yassuh, I shot one."

"Did you ever beat any up?"

"Yassuh, I beat up two niggers. Dey wuz—"

"Never mind. Were you afraid of 'em?"

"Waal, suh, I wuzn't to say skeered of 'em. But I wuz kinder skeered of whut dey wuz gwine to do to me, if I didn't do it fust. Whut you drivin' at, Mr. Will?"

"That's what I am driving at. The reason why I'm not going to shoot you or beat you up, why I haven't done it before this, is that I am not scared of what you are going to do to me."

"Lawd, Mr. Will, you sho' is a kyuous man. I ain't never thought—"

"Don't lie to me, don't say another word. Go on to your work."

Madison paused, then half turned irresolutely, then said to his mule, "Git up, Moll, we got to bust out dem middles."

"Come on, Bob," said Mr. Robertson, "we'll ride over and see Sim Senter while we are here."

Bob followed joyfully, but still there was a feeling in his mind that he would have been somehow better satisfied if his father had given Madison a sound thrashing with his quirt.

Sim Senter was the only white tenant Mr. Robertson had. He lived in a somewhat better house than the Negro tenants, and acted sometimes as a sort of foreman when there was work on hand that required a gang to do it, such as cleaning new ground or making hay. He despised the Negroes, and they had an ill-concealed contempt for him because he had "to work jes' like a nigger an' wuzn't nuthin' but po' white trash."

He was mending a wagon with a piece of baling wire when Mr. Robertson and Bob rode up, and a fringe of lank-haired children culminating in Susie, his fourteen

year old girl, were sitting on the edge of the floor of the front porch and swinging their bare feet and legs idly while they gazed with a sort of vacant intentness at the visitors and beyond them to the trees that shut out the horizon. "Howdy, Mr. Will," Sim said, "howdy, Bob."

"Howdy, Sim," they answered.

"How's the crop, Sim?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"Jes' fair to middlin, I reckon, Mr. Will. There's a right smart sprinklin' of boll-weevils in my strip of cotton down there by the timber, an' my corn looks like it is tryin' to turn yaller on me spite of all I can do. But I reckon it'll hold out maybe till the nineteenth. An' we're sho' to have rain then, if not befo'."

"Yes, it always rains on the nineteenth," said Bob.

"Sho' does," said Sim, "an' I'm mighty damn glad of it. The crops needs it, an' all the niggers dressed up in their finery gits a good wettin'."

"Sim, I don't think you ought to feel that way about it," said Mr. Robertson, "let 'em have their fun."

"Well, if it was up to me," said Sim, "I'd give 'em some fun. I'd let 'em see how funny it is to start to work at sun-up eve'y mawnin' an' never quit till sun-down, an' I'd be right behind 'em with a whup all the time. That'd be my fun for 'em."

"Why, Sim, you must be in a bad humor this morning, what have they been doing?"

"Turnin' in their stock on my corn," said Sim, "an' swearin' they break out of the paschur. Me and my oldest boy wuz up mighty nigh all last night drivin' old Sam's cattle out of my corn."

"I'll have to see Uncle Sam and talk to him," said Mr. Robertson.

"I wish you would, Mr. Will, an' you might throw in

a few words at Madison Mulberry while you are at it. He is the wust one of 'em all. I'm goin' to fill some cows' hides full of bird-shot, if not buckshot, hyeer before long."

"What about the hay this year, Sim?"

"They's jes' one thing about the hay, Mr. Will, an' that is, if I'm goin' to see to the cuttin' of it, I'm got to be boss. Every nigger on the place has got to thinkin' that he's the boss, an' I'm not goin' to stand it."

"I'll see to that," said Mr. Robertson.

"All right, Mr. Will, but I wish you would come into the house an' take a look at my second boy. He's down with somep'n sorter like dumb chills, an' it looks to me like he's in a powerful bad fix. Part of the time he don't know nuthin' at all."

"Has the doctor been out to see him yet?"

"Waal, I took him into town to see the doctor day-be-fo'-yestiddy, and he give him some medicine, but it don't do him no good."

Mr. Robertson dismounted and went inside, where he found Jim, a boy of sixteen, lying on a squalid bed, and unconscious.

"Great goodness alive, Sim! that's a sick boy," he said.

"Yes, I ain't been in my right mind for two or three days a-worryin' about him," said Sim. "His mother, she stayed up with him all last night, and she's in that other room now tryin' to git a little sleep."

"Put your oldest boy on a horse right away, and send for a doctor," said Mr. Robertson.

"I would ha' done that yestiddy, Mr. Will, but the doctors charge two dollars a visit and a dollar a mile for mileage and they calls it five miles from town out

hyeer. And you know that's mighty hard on a pore man, Mr. Will."

"Yes, but you haven't got time to think about that now. You've got to save your boy. If you can't pay the doctor, I'll pay him."

"Thank you, Mr. Will, I'll send Harry right now."

He went out into the yard and called, "Harry! Harry! Harry!" but there was no answer. Coming back he said, "Wait a minute, I'll blow the horn for him," and reached up to get from the wall a long and carefully polished steer's horn which hung by a string from a nail.

"No, wait," said Mr. Robertson, "you'll wake up Mrs. Senter so she won't be able to go back to sleep again. I'll send Bob."

Then going to the porch he said, "Bob, ride into town as fast as you can and tell Dr. Anderson to come right out here in a hurry. Jim's mighty sick."

"All right, Papa, but s'pose Dr. Anderson has gone fishing."

"Yes, that's very likely, the only good doctor there is, and he spends two-thirds of his time fishing and hunting. But that's the way we do things here! Well, if you can't find him, tell Dr. Bolton, he's better than nothing."

Bob left in a lope.

Turning back into the room, Mr. Robertson said, "Sim, if we pull Jim through—or if we don't—you must screen this house. You know I've offered to furnish you the wire many a time. Your family can't have any health with millions of flies and mosquitoes in the house all of the time."

"They *are* pretty bad, but shuckins! Mr. Will, ain't

we all growed up with flies and mosquitoes? You got a wire door slammin' all the time, an' you can't even spit out of a window when you put them screens over ever'-thing."

"Well, the flies and mosquitoes bring typhoid and malaria into the house all of the time."

"That's what they say now-a-days, Mr. Will, but we know better'n that. Them doctors now-a-days is always gittin' up some new-fangled notions to cost money. Dr. Anderson was raisin' sand hyeer not long ago 'cause I ain't got my privy half a mile from the well. I reckon he wants all of us to walk around for exercise. We git plenty of that chasin' up and down the cotton-rows."

"Well, you don't want the screens then?"

"Naw, suh, I don't want 'em. But if you say so, I might screen some of the windows."

"What good'll that do if you don't screen 'em all?"

"It won't do no good. If I wuz to screen 'em all, it wouldn't do no good, and ever' time you bring in a load of wood you got to contend with them damn slammin' wire doors, but I'll screen some of 'em jus' to please you, Mr. Will."

"No, you needn't mind," said Mr. Robertson, feeling that further insistence would be useless, as at best it could only result in exacting a promise that would never be carried out.

He continued, "I'll go over to Uncle Sam's and drop back by here when the doctor comes."

"Waal, don' forgit to tell him about them cattle," said Sim.

"All right, I won't," said Mr. Robertson, taking his departure.

He found Uncle Sam, an old Negro of seventy-five, giving his corn its last plowing. The stalks were higher than Uncle Sam's head. Indeed he and his mule were visible only when they came out at the end of a row. As Mr. Robertson approached, he was just coming out and made a picture, comic or pathetic, depending upon the disposition of the beholder.

He was tall and gaunt, and bent by years of toil. His gray, woolly beard looked almost white against the black background of his face. An old, flopping, wide-brimmed, dingy felt hat, ragged overalls and jumper, and shapeless brogan shoes constituted his costume. His gait was stiff and halting.

"Hi, Uncle Sam," called Mr. Robertson, seeking to attract his attention before he should turn back into another row.

Uncle Sam seemed to gaze at him quite calmly and as calmly turned his mule to start back. Mr. Robertson spurred up his horse and came quickly quite close up to him. "What's the matter, Uncle Sam," he asked, laughing, "aren't you speaking to me these days?"

"Lawd, Mr. Will. I axes your pahdon!" he exclaimed. "I took you for dat ar liniment man, an' I wuzn't gwine to pay you no mind."

"What liniment man?"

"Come along a man yestiddy wanted to sell me a bottle of liniment for dis old mule. Wanted me to give him a dollar for it. I told him naw, dis mule'll last long as I will, and to git out of hyeer. But I couldn't hardly git shed of him noway. An' he say he gwine to come back to-day an' sell me dat ar liniment willy-nilly. But how is you, Mr. Will?"

"Thank you, I'm well, Uncle Sam."

"And how is Miss Mamie? I ain't seed her in a long time."

"She is well, too, thank you."

"And Mr. Bob, I reckon he is all right?"

"Yes, he is all right, too, but how are you getting on?"

"Waal, suh, I would be gittin' on fine if it wuzn't for dis hyeer misery in my leg. Sometimes it gits me in de knee and den agin it ketches me in de hip-jint. An' it draws me so, Mr. Will, dat's whut I hates, it draws me so."

"Well, Uncle Sam, you mustn't work too hard. You are getting too old now. Your boys ought to do this work for you."

"Yassuh, dey he'ps me, but I kinder likes to give my cawn de las' plowin' myse'f. I ain't long for dis worl', Mr. Will, an' de chances is maybe I won't be plowin' hyeer next year, but I'll be praisin' de Lawd up yonder."

"No, Uncle Sam, don't talk that way. We will keep you going for a good many years yet. But you'd better stop work for this morning. There's no rush about this corn."

"Jes' as you say, Mr. Will. I 'speck I'll have time to run aroun' it soon of mawnin's and late of evenin's anyhow."

"Oh, you will have plenty of time. If you don't I'll make some of the others come and finish it up for you. But how is Aunt Hannah getting on?"

"Speakin' ginerally, Mr. Will, you mout say Hannah ain't no 'count. She's plumb wo' out, whut wid de rheumatiz an' de skiracter an' one thing another, you mout say she is wo' out."

"How many children has she had, Uncle Sam? I forget."

"Hannah is de mammy of fo'teen head of chillun, Mr. Will, 'leven livin' and three dead. An' whut's mo', I is de daddy of 'em all."

"Looks to me like you'd be wo' out too—hunh?—Uncle Sam?"

"Lawd, Mr. Will, you always is de man for yo' joke, but I'm putty good yit. Haw, haw, haw! I sho' is for a fac'."

"Well, what's this I hear about your cows getting into Mr. Senter's corn?"

"Lawd, Mr. Will, de cows did git aroun' and eat a little off de edges of his cawn patch. But it wuz his boy Harry lef' de paschur gate open. He's always runnin' roun' nights atter de gals. An' he don't keer nuthin' 'bout gates."

"Well, I don't know how that is," said Mr. Robertson, "but try to keep the cows shut up, so there won't be any trouble, Uncle Sam. And we are going to begin making hay before long. And I want you to tell your boys to mind Mr. Senter just the same as if it was me."

"Yassuh, Mr. Will, I'll tell 'em, an' dey'll do it, but I ain't sayin' it won't go agin de grain. Dey's a way to do eve'ything, Mr. Will, an' it looks like dese hyeer po' white folks never kin happen on it. Somehow or nuther dey goes at it de wrong way."

"That's all right," said Mr. Robertson, "but it is necessary for me to have Mr. Senter as the foreman of the hay gang, and I expect all the hands to mind him till that is over."

"Yassuh, my boys'll mind him. If dey is all married an' makin' a crop for deyselves, dey'll do whut I tells 'em, if two of 'em is been off to de War."

"I know they will, Uncle Sam, that's why I am telling

you about it and saving myself the trouble of going around to see them separately. But why should there be such a rucus about minding Mr. Senter? It's no disgrace to be poor. If so, what sort of shape would you be in yourself?"

"Lawd, Mr. Will, you know better'n dat. I is a nigger, an' it's natchul for a nigger to be po'. An' it don't make no diffunce if a white man ain't got no money. De question is, is his folks ever had anything? If dey ain't, den good-by, he jes' don't know how."

"Well, there may be something in that," said Mr. Robertson, laughing, "but I want all of you to bear in mind that Mr. Senter is your boss in that hay-making. Go home and put up your mule now and rest till about four o'clock this evening. Here's a little tobacco money to spend next time you go to town." He pitched Uncle Sam a fifty cent piece.

"Thank'ee, thank'ee kindly, Mr. Will," said Uncle Sam as he stooped rustily to pick up the money, and Mr. Robertson turned his horse to go.

After riding about to get a general view of the crops, Mr. Robertson made his way back to Sim Senter's house. Doctor Anderson was there. Fortunately Bob had met him on the way, bound for a lake that was not far from the lower place. There he had intended to spend the next two days fishing.

Mr. Robertson called him aside and asked him what he thought of the patient. "Well, he is a mighty sick boy," answered the doctor. "I should say malaria with some typhoid symptoms, and possibly hematuria, with enlargement of the spleen. I have taken some of his blood to send to the city for a test. I'll know better how to treat him when they wire me the result to-morrow."

"You think he is in danger, then?"

"Yes, he is in serious danger, but of course we may pull him through."

"Well, do all you can, doctor," said Mr. Robertson. "I am standing behind Sim as far as expenses are concerned."

"That's all right, Will, but it is not necessary. I'll take my chances on Sim. He is honest and will pay if he ever gets the money, but of course he will grumble a good deal. I'd spend some money myself to get this house screened and that privy and horse-lot moved further away from the well."

"Well, let us hope that this sickness will at least bring Sim to reason about those things."

"But it won't," said the doctor, spreading out both of his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

Bob had gotten off his horse and was sitting in the shade of a large cottonwood tree by Sim's hog-pen, which was a little way outside of Sim's front yard. Harry, a boy of twenty, and Sim's eldest, came riding up. "Well, how's mama this mawnin'?" he said to Bob, and grinned.

"Shut up," said Bob, blushing.

"Is that her apern string you've got tied round yo' neck?" he asked, pointing to Bob's tie.

"Look'ee here, now," answered Bob, "I've had enough of that. And I'd beat hell out of you, if your brother wasn't about to die in there."

"Oh, he said hell," chuckled Harry, "ain't he gittin' bad?"

"Harry, come hyeer this minute. Where you been?" called Sim.

"Whut you want?" answered Harry.

"Jim's about to die," Sim's voice was grief-stricken.

"Is that so, Papa, I'm a-comin'," and Harry jumped from his horse and went running to the porch. "Is he took wuss, Papa?"

"Yes, there's the doctor and Mr. Will in the back of the hall there. And they've took blood out of him, Harry."

"Where's Mama?"

"She's in the room now with Jim."

"You reckon I'd better go in there?"

"No, but you're to go back to town with the doctor and bring some medicine."

"Where's Susie?"

"She's back there fixin' to git ready to try to git some dinner. But I know she is goin' to make a mighty pore out at it, but yo' mama says she is wo' out, an' Susie will jes' have to do the best she kin."

"Somethin' is always happenin' to us," exclaimed Harry, "an' them damn Robertsons, don't nuthin' ever happen to them."

"Shut up yo' mouth," answered Sim, angrily. "They never wuz no better man than Mr. Will."

"Ridin' roun' hyeer and lordin' it over us all of the time," answered Harry, as a tear rolled down his cheek. "I wush it was that damn little mother-coddlin' baby that's settin' out yonder under that tree, 'stead of Jim."

"Hush, Harry, whut's got into you?"

"Hell's got into me, that's whut's got into me. Hyeer last' year Sister Mary died, an' we're jus' so damn pore an' don't know nuthin' an' can't do nuthin' an' never have nuthin'." He struggled to choke back a sob.

Dr. Anderson and Mr. Robertson came out to the porch. "Come on, Harry, if you are going to town with me," said the doctor.

CHAPTER X

While Mr. Robertson and Bob were away from home that morning, Cindy took the opportunity of consulting with Miss Mamie about a matter of importance.

"You know, Miss Mamie," she said, "I been thinkin' a whole lot hyeer lately."

"What about, Cindy?"

"Waal, Cyrus, he keep a-pesterin' me till it looks like I can't have no peace."

"What's Cyrus bothering you about now?"

"Waal, 'um, he wants me to marry him."

"I should think you'd be glad of that. He and you ought to have married long ago."

"How's dat, Miss Mamie?" and Cindy tittered.

"You have been living with him for a year or more, Cindy, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Yassum, I is when I thinks about it sometimes, an' den I says to myse'f I don't know. You see, Miss Mamie, it's dis a-way. If you is livin' wid a man an' he gits mean an' you ain't married to him, you kin tell him to light out, you done lost yo' tas'e for 'im. But if you is married to him, why den, Miss Mamie, you sorter b'longs to 'im, an' whut you gwine to do?"

"Yes, Cindy, but aren't you a member of the church?"

"Yassum, I's a member. I been a strong Babtis' for de longest. But dat's one thing, an' marryin' is another. No'm, I don't dance an' I don't go gaddin' roun' hyeer atter all de men like some of dese women. I don't never work on Sunday 'ceppen jes' to cook yo' meals, an' I

shouts at eve'y meetin' and cawntributes to de church regular. But when it comes to gittin' tied to a nigger like Cyrus, I don't know. Maybe I won't like him long, an' den maybe I will. How kin anybody tell?"

"But had you ever thought, Cindy, that he would be tied to you, too? As it is now, 'most any woman might come along and get him any time."

"None of 'em better not come pesterin' 'round Cyrus, Miss Mamie. I tell you, dey better not."

"But suppose he decides he wants to marry, and if you won't marry him, he'll have to try to find somebody else."

"Yassum, dey's somep'n in dat, he mout slip off an' do it, but looks like I can't git no confidence in Cyrus somehow. He's been argyfyin' an' argyfyin' wid me, but I don' believe mo' 'n half of whut dat nigger tells me. He say he want to marry an' settle down. But like it is now, my wages is mine, an' I make Cyrus gi' me part of his'n. But whut if we wuz to marry an' settle down, den it mout be dat his wages would be his'n an' he'd take mine, too. 'Let well enough alone' ain't sich a bad rule, Miss Mamie. And lots of folks is married dat ain't doin' well. An' den sometimes Cyrus is so proud of hisse'f about bein' off at de War I has to take him down strong."

"But certainly if you would speak to your pastor, Cindy, he'd tell you that it is your duty to marry Cyrus."

"Lawd, Miss Mamie, you can't tell me nuthin' about nigger preachers. I knows 'em."

"But some of 'em must be good," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Yassum, some of 'em is good all right, but mostly dey

is preachers inside de pulpit an' men folks outside. An' you never kin tell till you is tried 'em out."

"Have you tried any of 'em out, Cindy?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Is I, Miss Mamie?" Cindy laughed vociferously and bridled with a remembrance of former triumphs.

"Oh, Cindy, I don't know what is ever going to become of all you black folks!" said Mrs. Robertson sadly, but yet with some lurking amusement in her eyes.

"No'm, dey ain't no tellin'," said Cindy.

"That's one thing that is the matter with you, down in your hearts you think there is no use, but why don't you try, really try, to live better? You must remember that Christ died for you as well as for the white folks."

"Yassum, dat's so," said Cindy, "an' I reckon I'll haf' to marry Cyrus." Her face clouded up, but after a moment came a gleam of brightness, as she added, "If he gits too mean, I kin git me a divo'ce, if it do cost twenty-five dollars. Yassum, I kin do dat."

"Oh, Cindy!" said Mrs. Robertson, hopelessly. But then she smiled. "You better run along now and start dinner, so as to have it ready by the time Mr. Will and Mr. Bob get back."

CHAPTER XI

Two days, Saturday and Sunday, passed by and it was Monday, the thirteenth of June, and John Ramsey had not screwed his courage to the point of asking for the loan of the little pasture. But he and his tribe had worked hard in the cotton and corn during the week days, even on Saturday afternoon, and at night he had stirred about with such energy that already arrangements were made to buy two shotes from Madison Mulberry and a yearling from Joe Williams, and a chattel mortgage on his team had been given to Mr. Tony Peters for forty dollars, which John buried in a baking-powder can under his corn crib. Word had also been sent out to all of the Negroes.

"If I gits de 'rangements made," said John to himself, "befo' I tells Mr. Will, he'll be 'most sho' to let me have de paschur, 'cause he'll hate to bust up my 'rangements."

At eight o'clock in the morning Mr. Robertson and Bob were inspecting John's crop from the slight roadway that led along the edge of the field across the railroad to the big pasture.

John, Sally, and the three boys were making the grass fly at the far end of the field.

"He has certainly made fine headway here in the past few days," said Mr. Robertson, "he must want something or have some sort of special scheme on foot."

"It will have something to do with the Nineteenth, I expect," said Bob.

"I reckon so," answered Mr. Robertson, "but you can run along now to the pasture and take a squint at the

cattle and fences, and I'll go on to town." Accordingly they separated, turning their horses' heads in opposite directions.

Much went on inside of Bob that was not betrayed by anything he said or did in the presence of his father or mother. Just then as he rode along, his mind was dwelling on his encounter with Harry Senter, and his thoughts ran, "If a feller tries to be decent and gentlemanly, they call him a mama's boy. They think I'm scared to do anything. I'll show 'em. I'm goin' to whip hell out of that Harry Senter, if it's the last thing I do. And I'm goin' to break loose. I'm tired of bein' pinned down all of the time. If ever I start out from home, night or day, it's, 'Where are you going, Bob? What are you going to do? When are you coming back?' They think I'm about six years old, that's what they think!"

He crossed the railroad right of way, opened the gate on the other side and rode into the pasture.

From the far end of the field a pair of eyes watched him with consuming interest. Those eyes belonged to Sally. "Had I better go now or wait a while?" she asked herself. Then she added, "Hunh, it's best to be sho'. He might spen' a lot of time ridin' aroun' de paschur, an' den agin he might not. Anyway out dar I'll be restin', and hyeer I is a-workin'. An' if he comes soon or late, I'll be on de spot."

She dropped her hoe, slipped through the fence, stole across the railroad track, down the other side, through the fence there and its fringe of bushes and high weeds, and came out on the comparatively open bank of the swimming-hole, where was a luxuriant growth of Bermuda grass. Across this she went to the edge of the water, pulled off her old battered straw hat, and dropped

it to the ground. The rest of her garb consisted of a one-piece dress made of rather heavy gingham and buttoned down the back. She reached back and unbuttoned this, apparently having it in mind to plunge in and take a swim. She was already bare-footed, as she wore no shoes while working in the field.

But if she had intended to take a swim, her mind changed, for she sat down under the shade of an overhanging ash tree and merely dabbled her dusty feet in the water. Through the sparse foliage above her the sun played hide and seek with the bronze of her dripping feet and the pale gold of her glistening shoulder disclosed by the slipping of her unbuttoned dress. One standing close behind her and looking over, would have seen that her heart was beating tempestuously.

Bending far back, she reached for the hat where it had fallen. "I better put dis hat somewhar now," she thought, and carefully crushed it down close to the trunk of the tree.

Bob found his yearling well and frisky, and engaged in the exchange of butting amenities with another member of the small herd. In riding along the fence he halted at a shady spot to watch the birth of a calf from old Brindle, one of the milking cows, and further along the begetting of another on the body of a restive heifer. Such sights were not unusual in the pasture, but always had for him a singular fascination, and produced in him a pleasurable perturbation.

This time, queerly, the heat of his mind was tempered by the recollection of his conversion during the preceding summer. The scene came back to him vividly of Brother Maxcy's warm hand-clasp at the chancel rail, of his mother's tearfully happy embrace, of the many members crowd-

ing around to welcome him into the fold, of his father's shy look of rejoicing, and of the demure excitement in the moist glance of Minnie Deane. He remembered his elation mingled with a sense of wonder whether anything had really happened to him to justify all of that stir. But at any rate his father and mother were greatly pleased, and he would not have to keep up any longer that constant mental resistance to the pleas of hymn and sermon to come and be saved. And then his embarrassment after he came out of the church under the eyes of many of his acquaintances who were still technically sinners! How quickly he had fled to the family car as a sort of sanctuary!

And since then there had been a feeling of stiffness and estrangement in his intercourse with many of his schoolmates. He felt somehow that he had always to be on the defensive. And Harry Senter was not the only one who had thrown gibes at him. "Bob is so damned good butter wouldn't melt in his mouth," had said some of them. And at the railroad station or post-office men would sometimes break off in the middle of stories that they were telling to interested groups when he approached. And there would be a quizzical look in their eyes as they glanced at him. But there were others who seemed to make a special point of uttering the grossest obscenities in his presence and of laughing at his blushes. And he always had an unpleasant feeling that he blushed more because he knew they expected him to blush than because he really was ashamed to hear. But, too, he truly had experienced shame at the grossness, though it had about it a certain attractiveness, because somehow it seemed free and unrestricted.

"That's what's the matter," he muttered, half sighing

as his mind came back to the here and now. "I want a little freedom. I'm mortally tired of being always cooped up."

Petulantly he spurred Saladin, who, surprised at the abrupt dig, swerved so suddenly as almost to unseat him.

"Damn you!" exclaimed Bob, "I'll teach you," and greatly to his own surprise he found himself uttering a string of oaths and beating Saladin over the head with his quirt. Saladin reared and pitched. "I'll ride you! I'll ride you!" Bob shouted.

Then it was as if he came to himself. He dropped his quirt and calmed the horse gently. "Whoa, Saladin, whoa-a-a, old feller. Did I abuse you? Didn't treat you right, did I? Whoa, whoa, now," and he patted the horse gently on the neck.

When Saladin was quieted, Bob got down, picked up the quirt, mounted again, and rode on, thinking, "What in the world came over me?" But then he smiled, saying, "I can manage Saladin whatever he does." And then after a moment, "I shore did break loose!" In him there was a feeling of triumph.

On around the fence he rode until he came to where it crossed Berry Creek, from which point it ran along the far side, enclosing a stretch of the stream in the pasture to afford a supply of water for the cattle. Bob followed the near bank of the creek, looking across at the fence from time to time.

As he neared the swimming-hole, his mind reverted to Sally and the incident of a few days before. The element of comedy in it must have come uppermost in his mind, for he smiled at the recollection. But it was an adventure, too, and he thought, "I believe I'll try it again just to see what will happen."

As before, he dismounted, hitched Saladin to a sapling, walked to the bank of the creek, sat down, and pulled off his shoes and socks. From near at hand came a smothered cry, "He'p, he'p, I'se drowndin'."

Sally, screened from his observation by the trunk of the ash tree, had wriggled out of her dress and slipped quietly into the water.

Bob rushed barefooted to the rescue. He waded out, caught hold of the yellow hands waving above the surface, and pulled vigorously until he could get a grip on the arms and lift the head that remained stubbornly under the water. He saw it was Sally, and came near to letting go his hold. He was in a quandary, but there was nothing to do except drag her out on the bank.

She appeared almost lifeless, so limp was she. He half carried, half dragged her to the spot of luxuriant Bermuda grass, let her fall prone upon it, and began to work her arms back and forth, as he had somewhere heard should be done with half-drowned people. She seemed hard to resuscitate, her breath came but gaspingly, and something was the matter with his own breathing.

"This will never do," he said half aloud, "I must get some help." His eye fell on Sally's discarded dress. He let go her hands and was in the act of turning to get the dress to spread over her while he should run and call for assistance.

But suddenly he felt his bare foot clasped, and heard, "Mr. Bob, Mr. Bob, don't leave me!"

When he did leave her, he rode back across the railroad and along the edge of John Ramsey's field in a sort of exultant, abashed, and remorseful amazement.

From a little distance down a row, John waved his hand and called, "Hello, Mr. Bob!"

But to Bob, John Ramsey had taken on a new aspect. For the first time in his life he felt the need to think before answering a salutation from John. In his mind there was an apprehension lest the simple greeting betrayed unwonted and disrespectful familiarity. But in a moment he reflected that in fact it was the same greeting as always and uttered in the same cheerful manner. And there flashed through his brain the steadying thought, "How could John know!"

So he waved back, "Hello, John!" And he added as a further evidence of composure, "Mighty hot this morning, but you are making the grass fly."

"I sho' is, Mr. Bob. But you got yo' pants wet. Is you been wadin' de creek?"

"No, it's nothing," said Bob glibly. "I just slipped in." And he spurred Saladin to a lope.

When he reached home, his father was again sitting on the front porch reading the morning paper. Bob hoped he might get by him unperceived. At any rate it was better to risk it than to take the chance of riding around to the back and running the gauntlet of Cyrus, Cindy, and probably his mother. And maybe his father wouldn't notice the dampness of his trousers after all, as the sun had nearly dried them.

"Well, Bob?" said his father.

"Old Brindle has got a new calf, Papa."

"That's good. But your breeches are wet. Did you fall in the creek?"

It popped into Bob's mind and he said, but with some confusion, "I went to water Saladin and my quirt dropped

into the creek, and I had to ride deeper to get it than I expected." And he hurried into the house.

Mr. Robertson thought, "The quirt is loaded and would have sunk immediately. And his shoes have not been wet, and why the hurry? Why the confusion?"

Then he rose and himself led Saladin to the water trough at the rear. The horse drank greedily. "This horse has had no water since leaving home this morning," he said to himself, his brows knitted in thought, "I wonder."

When Sally came back to the field, she said to John, "We gwine to git de paschur all right. You kin ax him any time now."

"Nunck-unh," said John, "you can't fool me wid your big talk. You wuzn't keerin' nuthin' about no paschur anyhow. We got to clean out dis fiel'. Git to it!"

But Sally pitched her hoe into the rank growth of big weeds by the branch, and with a toss of her head started to the house.

"Waal, I 'clar to goodness, she must ha'," said John.

CHAPTER XII

THE store of Thompson & Co. faced east. In the afternoon the wooden gallery in front of it was shady. Mr. Hiram Shorter was fond of company and of talk, so he had placed a wooden bench and two or three empty cracker-boxes on this gallery, and there was always a chair or so in the doorway of the store.

On the afternoon of the sixteenth the congregation of porch gossipers consisted of Mr. Hiram Shorter himself, Mr. Robertson, Brother Maxcy, Judge Mowry, a lawyer and the skeptic of the town, Mr. Tony Peters, Randy Shallow, Dr. Anderson, and Bob Randell and Mr. Prouty, who never had amounted to much and who now sat on the edge of the floor and leaned against the gallery posts, and two poor whites from the piney woods who squatted on their haunches out in front.

"I just finished reading a book yesterday on the nigger question written by a man in Boston," said Judge Mowry, "of all the rot! It was the damnedest—I beg your pardon, Brother Maxcy, but there ain't no weaker word that'll do it justice—the damnedest stuff!"

"Just about the usual thing, I reckon," said Mr. Hiram.

"Well, yes, and then some," said Judge Mowry. "Anybody would think from readin' it that we spend all of our time down here lynchin' niggers."

"The only trouble that I see," said Mr. Prouty, changing his tobacco to his other jaw, "is that we don't lynch enough of 'em."

One of the piney woods men, Zeke Stallins, with his

left hand pulled out his lower lip, and into the cavity thus formed he poured with his right about half a box of snuff. The other one said in answer to Mr. Prouty, "Now you're shoutin'."

"Zeke, don't you take a lot of snuff at one time?" asked Brother Maxcy smiling.

"Yas, Parson, I always b'lieve in bein' liberal with myse'f. Ptui!" he answered solemnly.

"That trait, I observe, is a very common one," said Brother Maxcy.

"Well, it's the only way to git ahead," said Randy Shallow. "I've noticed that these fellers that are so liberal with everybody else is always in debt to their creditors." And he cast a glance at Mr. Robertson.

"Specially with niggers," said Mr. Tony Peters.

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Hiram, "I'd as soon trust a nigger as a white man. I'd rather trust some of 'em. They'll pay you if they ever get the money."

"But I ain't got time to wait on 'em always," said Tony Peters. "I let 'em have money on their stock, but if they don't pay when their time is up, I go and git the stock. That little new whipper-snapper in the bank asked me if I wuzn't goin' to foreclose and sue and git judgment and advertise and sell and all that when Bill Hawkins' note fell due last month on his team. I told him I knew somethin' to beat that, I'd jus' go out and git the team. And I done it, an' I notified the clerk to mark the mortgage released. Of course if it had have been one of Will Robertson's niggers, I would have gone to Will and got the money, and the nigger never would have paid Will, ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh, some of 'em pay me," said Mr. Robertson, embarrassed.

"Well, at any rate," hastened Brother Maxcy to the rescue, "a nigger is a human being and ought to be treated like one."

"Sometimes I think they are, and sometimes I think they ain't," said Randy Shallow. "But I don't think a nigger ought to be lynched, jus' for stealin' or somethin' like that. That's natchul. They can't he'p it. Of co'se when they git so impident you can't do nuthin' with 'em, or they commit murder or rape some woman, that's different."

"Well, I don't know about stealin'," said Mr. Tony Peters.

"What do you think, Will, about this lynchin' business?" asked Judge Mowry.

"Oh, you know what I think," answered Mr. Robertson. "I think every man, white or black, has a right to a fair trial when he is accused of a crime."

"But suppose it was some of your own women folks."

"Yes, how about that?" exclaimed Randy Shallow. "Put the shoe on your own foot."

"Well, I don't know—" began Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, he don't know when it comes home to him," chuckled Mr. Tony Peters.

"Isn't it this way," said Brother Maxcy, "that no man, no honest man, can say that he would be an unbiased judge when a thing like that comes home to him? What he would want to do, what he would want to have done, maybe wouldn't be the just or right thing, and in his moments of coolness he knows that he ought not then to be the judge."

"But think of it, Brother Maxcy," said Judge Mowry, "she is a white woman. She hasn't done anything. And

think of the horror of it to her. And then are you going to bring her up before a judge and jury and a court-room full of people and make her testify to the soul-racking details of her own shame, just to give a damn black brute a fair trial? No, suh, by God! I'm a lawyer, but I'll be damned if I'll ever advocate anything like that."

"Hooray!" shouted Zeke, "now you're handin' it out, Jedge!"

"Yes, they ought to be hung then and there," said Mr. Hiram Shorter.

"Hangin', hell!" said Mr. Tony Peters, "hangin's too good for 'em. I say burn 'em, and you can't make the fire too hot."

"All that's so," said Mr. Robertson, "but how's a mob to know whether they've got the right man or not. They're not going to take time—"

"Time, the devil!" said Judge Mowry, "of course a mob ought to be careful, but what if they do make a mistake once in a while? Ain't that better than lettin' any of the black brutes escape and ruin your home or mine? Suppose we do burn a few extra ones. What then? We'll make 'em see that if we don't get one, we'll get another, and they all better look out. But did you ever hear of a mob gettin' the wrong one?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," answered Mr. Robertson, "no man can know. But fortunately we've had mighty little of that sort of thing in this community. Our niggers are for the most part well-behaved."

"Well, they better be," said Randy Shallow, "and they know it."

"That Boston feller said in his book that when any raping was done by niggers, if ever—mind you, if ever

—it was out of revenge because of the conduct of the white men with the nigger women. What do you think of that, Brother Maxcy?"

"I don't think so," answered Brother Maxcy. "But what do you think, Dr. Anderson? You haven't said a word this evening."

"Well," answered the doctor, "I don't think so, either. My notion is that niggers are an inferior race and can't control themselves so well, and besides they naturally have stronger passions than we do, men and women. And one of 'em gets to thinking and thinking and his chance comes, and blooie! he blows up."

"But do they have stronger passions?" asked the judge.

"Mr. Hiram ought to know about that," answered the doctor, winking at Randy Shallow.

Randy laughed, "Ha! ha! ha!"

Mr. Hiram blushed scarlet, and couldn't find any ready answer to make.

"No," said Mr. Tony Peters, "no, I don't believe he has ever had a chance to make any comparisons. His calculations have been all on one side of the ledger, so to speak. Ha! ha! ha! Doc, speak for yourself."

"No," answered the doctor, "we are not at an experience meetin', eh, Brother Maxcy? This is a free-for-all, open discussion of an abstract question," and he grinned.

"I am afraid," said Brother Maxcy, "that there wouldn't be much stone throwing here if we followed the biblical injunction and only let him who is without sin throw the first one."

"I move we poll the jury," said Randy Shallow, "beginning with Zeke. Zeke Stebbins, layin' your hand on your heart and so help you God, have you ever—?"

"Now, look'ee here," said Mr. Hiram, much to the re-

lief of Mr. Robertson, the doctor, the judge, and Brother Maxcy, "I think this thing is gettin' too personal. I'm not claimin' to be so good myself, but we've got to have some respect for Brother Maxcy's calling."

It was Brother Maxcy's turn to blush. "No," he said, "don't consider me. I'm willing to take my turn along with the others."

"No," said the judge, "we all know that if you should not plead guilty, having grown up in the South, there would be those here who would think you are lying. And if you should plead guilty, some of us would be too glad of it, and use it as an excuse. If all of the preachers were like you, Brother Maxcy, I might be different from what I am. But they are not; no, not by a hell of sight."

Randy Shallow winked at Tony Peters, who grinned maliciously, and Zeke brought down the house by saying, "I never did have no use for nigger women nohow, did you, Randy?"

"About the way I figure it out," said Mr. Robertson when the laughter had subsided, "is that here it's pretty much as it is everywhere else. Here most of the women who happen to be poor and ignorant are niggers, and—"

"Damn you, Will Robertson, air you goin' to say that all the women that is pore—" flared up the other piney woods man, Zeke's companion.

"No, wait a minute, don't fly off the handle, I was going to say that it is easier everywhere to take advantage of a woman that is poor and ignorant, and here the nigger women form a sort of bulwark to protect the white. It's a rare thing to find a loose white woman in this community. I don't know of a single one, do you?" He turned to the piney woods man who had just spoken.

"Waal, I wouldn't go as fur as that," said he, "but they

air skeerse. There's maybe a gal or two slips up once in a while, but once married, our women air jes' nacherly good."

"Yes," said Mr. Hiram, "a Southern lady is a little lower than an angel, and mighty little at that."

"That does your heart credit, Mr. Hiram," said Brother Maxcy.

"Not to say nuthin' about his head," spoke up Randy Shallow, "but it ain't only ignorance and poverty, Will, and the blame ain't all on the side of the men."

"Randy, you ought to know," said Doctor Anderson smiling. Then he added, "No, Randy is right partly and Will is right partly. Inferior races, like the mentally weak, are both more subject to sexual passion and less capable of any kind of restraint, men and women. And of course women have passions, too. And everywhere the world over, women look up to and worship and give themselves to the conquerors. In our cities a rich man can marry nearly any woman he wants. Why? Because he is dominant. It is not altogether that she is bought. It is more because she wants to lord it over the other women and have them envying her. Of course here nigger women can't marry white men. It's against the law, and rightly. But to be personal, Will, take your son Bob. He is one of the outstanding young men of this community, and nearly any nigger girl here would be glad to—to—have relations with him, and would brag about it afterwards."

"But is it your real belief, doctor, that no nigger women are virtuous?" asked Brother Maxcy.

"Notice, Brother Maxcy, that I said *nearly* any nigger girl. To be personal again, I believe that Joe Williams's girls are as virtuous as any white woman in the coun-

try. They've been brought up right. But they will have a harder fight to stay virtuous than white girls have, both on account of the race to which they belong and on account of the circumstances in which they find themselves."

"From what you say, Doc," spoke Tony Peters, "anybody would think that nigger women are mighty virtuous when it comes to men of their own color, while you and I know—"

"Yes," broke in Randy Shallow, "they tell me that that long black Baptis' preacher is usin' round Joe Williams's house a whole lot now with his eye on Lucindy if nuthin' more, and I bet there's plenty more. Ha! ha! ha! You see what becomes of your virtuous nigger women, Doc."

"Well," said Brother Maxcy, "I know that preacher, and I believe he is a good man trying to help his people."

"Been off to college, hasn't he? Ha! ha! ha!" said Bob Randell. "Think of that, a nigger been off to college, and talks as proper as hell! Don't it kill you though? Ha! ha! ha! And dresses up as slick as a brass button. I bet he's puttin' all sorts of foolishness in the other niggers' heads. He ought to be run out of the country, that's what I say."

"Let's see," said the judge, "where did he go?"

"He went off to school somewhere in Texas, then in Alabama, I believe, and then to some theological seminary up North," said Brother Maxcy. "How Tobe Sanders, his old daddy, kept him a-going, I don't know. Old Tobe hasn't got anything. He just rents some land and farms it like these other niggers around here."

"I thought them theological seminaries was colleges for white folks," said Tony Peters.

"Oh, they all go together up there," said the judge.

"God a'mighty!" exclaimed Mr. Prouty, "what's this country a-comin' to?"

"He's named Richard, ain't he?" said the judge. "Yes, Richard Sanders."

"Yes, that's his name," said Mr. Hiram, "Tobe is a good old nigger, and he mighty nigh starved himself and the rest of the family to death to keep Richard up. I know, because he trades with us."

"Well, the nigger will come out in this holy Richard yet. He gives me a pain," said Tony Peters.

"I expect it will," said the judge.

"More than likely," agreed Dr. Anderson. "At any rate he hasn't got much of a chance to stand out against the women. He won't have to be running after them. They'll be running after him."

"If I wuz a nigger, I'd sho' be a preacher," said Zeke.

All joined in a laugh and looked quizzically at Brother Maxcy, who said, not without embarrassment, "Well, Zeke, I suppose it is a good thing for both of us that we are not niggers."

"But they tell me, Mr. Will," said Mr. Hiram, "that you are goin' to let John Ramsey give the Nineteenth Celebration in your little pasture."

"Yes, he begged so hard," said Mr. Robertson, "and he has been working mighty well here lately."

"Oh," said Tony Peters, "that's what he got that sixty dollars from me on his team for!"

"The dog-gone rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Robertson, "he told me he didn't have any money at all, and I let him have ten dollars."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Tony Peters.

"Well," said Randy Shallow, "if his note reads just

sixty and he give it to Tony, I bet he ain't got any money to throw away."

The laugh was on Tony Peters, but he diverted it by asking, "What do you fellers think of this here new Ku Klux Klan? I see they tarred and feathered a feller down to Houston the other day. And that ain't all they done, they made a lady out of him. Ha! ha! ha! they shore did."

"Yes, I read about it," said Mr. Robertson, "I think it is a cowardly thing for a band of masked men to waylay and assault any citizen of our country, white or black."

"Wuz this feller white or black?" asked Zeke.

"He was white," answered Mr. Robertson.

"What had he been a-doin'?"

"They say he'd been runnin' with a nigger woman," answered Tony Peters.

"Lawd sakes!" exclaimed Zeke, "did they treat him that a-way jes' for that?"

"Yes," said Judge Mowry, "there have been several cases of that kind in the State recently and over the South generally. The Ku Klux say they are going to maintain race purity and see that whites and blacks don't mix."

"I don't know anything that has distressed me more than this disregard of law and order," said Doctor Anderson. "And the crimes of these gangs are committed under the pretext of aiding the law. It's abominable. It's damnable! Mark my words, it won't be long before they will be tarring and feathering some defenseless woman!"

"Oh, I don't think any Texan would do that," said Brother Maxcy, "surely we are not as bad as that. But it seems to me the officers of the law are scared of this

Klan, and if it is not stopped soon we will have the whole country overrun by masked bands committing murders and midnight assaults for private revenge or from pure malice."

"Right you are," said Judge Mowry. "The thing's got to be stopped, but it looks like the Ku Klux Klan are spreadin' everywhere, there's a new white-cap procession with a flaming cross or some such damn foolishness in a different county nearly every night of late."

"Do they wear them white robes an' things ever' time they go after a feller?" asked Zeke.

"No, it seems not," answered Judge Mowry, "but usually they wear a mask of some kind. If a real scrimmage should come up, I imagine the flowing white robes might be in the way. The costume seems to be kept mainly for full-dress occasions, so to speak."

"What if they was to come here, Randy, what would you and Mr. Hiram and Henry Thompson and a lot of other fellers around here do?" asked Tony Peters.

"I don't know what the others would do," answered Randy, "but I'd join 'em. I'd rather be on the inside lookin' out, than on the outside bein' tarred an' feathered—not to speak of nuthin' else," and he grinned.

"Would you jine 'em, Mr. Hiram?" asked Zeke.

"No," said Mr. Hiram, shortly, "would you?"

"Waal, I don' know, I sorter think it would be right smart fun to take some of these fellers out here an' man-handle 'em. Of course I wouldn't want to ruin no man, but a little tar and feather would show some of 'em up pretty good, hunh, Mr. Prouty?"

Mr. Prouty and Bob Randell laughed as did Zeke's companion, and Mr. Prouty answered, "It might take the pride out of some of 'em as is so high an' mighty an'

pious like, you know," and he cut his eye at Mr. Hiram.

"They'd sho' git old Henry Thompson first pop," surmised Tony Peters.

"Don't you think it?" said Bob Randell, "he'd be the fust one to jine. He'd kinder have to jine in self-defense. I wouldn't be s'prised if he wuz to start it up hisse'f, jes' to be on the safe side."

"No, he's too bashful to start anything like that," said Randy Shallow, "but it's a funny thing about Henry. He ain't a bit bashful when it comes to fightin' men. Jes' make him mad, and you'll see. He'll kill you quicker'n a flash. He's bashful all right, but he ain't skeered of nuthin'."

"Well, I don' know," said Tony Peters, "they wear masks, don't they? Seems to me that's where a bashful man would shine,"

"That's where cowards shine," said Brother Maxcy.

"If they want to purify the morals of the country and help enforce the law, why don't they come out openly?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"They are liars and the sons of liars and cowardly skulks," said Judge Mowry, "that's why! There are lots of things I don't believe, but I know good and well that if the morals of this country are to be purified, it's the church and them that train with it that'll have to do the job, and it won't be done by intimidation and assault and murder by masked men at night."

"Well," said Mr. Prouty, "I wasn't meanin' no harm. I was jes' sorter jokin', you know, about takin' the pride out of anybody."

"I don't reckon they'll come here anyhow," said Randy Shallow, "but if they do, I know good an' well there'll be lots of fellers that'll join 'em, an' most of 'em'll be

like me, join 'em in self-defense, they'll be tryin' to do unto the other feller like he would do unto you an' do it fust. I know in reason that nobody like Brother Maxcy or Will Robertson or Judge Mowry or Dr. Anderson would join, and so does everybody else."

"But, really, I think the thing is due in large measure to such unrest as is bound to follow a great war, and that it will subside as suddenly as it comes," said Brother Maxcy, "but it must be said to their credit that they do make some donations to charity."

The whistle of the afternoon train was heard, and the assembly adjourned hurriedly to the station to see who was coming and going, and to connect themselves pleasurably, for a moment, with the vast outside world by close proximity to its visible and tangible symbol.

CHAPTER XIII

On the morning of the seventeenth, John Ramsey, his family, and five or six outside Negroes, who were promised free barbecue and lemonade in payment for their help, set to work in the little pasture to make all ready for the celebration.

They had to dig the barbecue pit, make brush arbors for shade, put up rough booths for lemonade and bottled soda-water, arrange a table of pine boards, make a few benches, lay off a foot-race course and smooth a place for broad jumping, convert a long pine sapling into a greased pole and erect it, and assemble fuel for the barbecuing.

John had ordered a supply of baker's bread and ice from the city through Mr. Hiram Shorter and also a few watermelons at a cost of a dollar and a half apiece. For in spite of all the Negroes could do, they couldn't get their watermelons ripe for the Nineteenth. The ones that John ordered had been shipped from Florida or South Georgia. But John knew well he could sell them at a profit by the slice, although they would be very dear.

Early in the afternoon Joe Williams delivered the yearling steer, skinned, dressed, and ready for the fire, at a cost of seventeen dollars and fifteen cents. Joe had the reputation of never selling anything unless he got a little more. It was a common thing to see along the roads of the region advertising signs of local merchants bearing the inscription, "We sell for less." Joe's acquaintances were unanimous in thinking that he ought to have a sign

over his house, warning, "I sell for more." But John had whittled him down from eighteen dollars and a quarter to seventeen dollars and fifteen cents with one helping of barbecued meat to be thrown in gratis.

About dark, Madison Mulberry came with the two shotes. They were fat and prime and dressed in proper form, except that their ears were missing.

"How come, Brother Mulberry, dat dese shotes ain't got no years," asked John, "wuz dey deef? Haw! haw! haw! wuz dey deef?"

"Oh, go 'long, Ramsey, gi' me my ten dollars. I ain't got no time to fool wid you," answered Madison.

"Waal, de way I looks at it," said John, "is, dat eve'y shote ought to have years. Years is de bes' part of a shote when he is bobbycued, but I ain't gwine to be hard on you, Brother Mulberry, I'll jes' knock off ten cents a year. Two shotes would have fo' years, an' dat would come to forty cents, an' a dime for good luck, so nine dollars an' a half, take it or leave it." John was profiting by his recent trading bout with Brother Williams.

"Gi' me de money," said Madison, "I wouldn't scrape fo' years of a shote in dis hot weather for no forty cents. I cut 'em off and pitched 'em to my dawgs. Gi' me de money."

John counted him out nine dollars and a half. Madison took it, and hurried away, as he wanted to get across the county line to Farmville, where prohibition was not so strictly enforced as in Compton county. Though by no means a drunkard, Madison had a weakness for whiskey, against which he did not struggle very strenuously, especially when a celebration was on hand.

"I reckon I kin git dar in time if I hurries," said Madison to himself, as he drove along in his ramshackle

buggy. "I didn't have no time to fool 'long wid dat little fo' bits. Anyhow I got me some money for de Nineteenth. Haw! haw! haw! Come up hyeer, Moll, you got to beat dat gait," and he whacked the mule vigorously with the long stem of a coffee weed that he had cut for a buggy whip.

By nine o'clock that night John and his gang had everything ready for the morrow. "When I thinks 'bout dat bobbycue," said one of his helpers, "my mouf fair dribbles at de cawners."

The Ramsey family went to bed, but could hardly sleep for eager expectancy. Anyhow they were to rise before day to light the fire in the pits and be ready to begin on time the actual work of the barbecuing. Even Liza felt a thrill of pride in John as she prefigured him turning over the carcasses and basting them with a mixture of sauces, while crowds of expectant Negroes stood by and watched with envious glances from greedy eyes. And in a sense she was to be queen of the occasion, as her husband would be its central figure. And her mind ran delightfully on to what they would do with the hundred dollars or more of profit. A gaudy new dress and patent-leather shoes for herself were the very least that she could imagine.

At earliest dawn they arose. "It looks mighty cloudy," said Rosy.

"Hurry up, eve'ybody, an' git out to de paschur," commanded John, "dem ain't nuthin' but Gulf clouds. Dey'll be gone in an hour. Hustle, folks, you kin come back after a while an' put on yo' Sunday clo'es. We got to git things to goin' befo' dem niggers gethers."

They crossed the road to the little pasture, built the fires, put the iron bars across the pits, brought out the

meat, got ready the mixture of sauces, and began the cooking. At seven o'clock it commenced to sprinkle rain.

"Gaad a'mighty," said John, "if you ever is gwine to do anything for dis nigger, do it now. Don't let it rain. All I axes you, Gaad, is don't let it rain."

It held up a little while. "I believe it is goin' to clar up after all," said Liza.

"It better," answered John.

At nine o'clock the meat was nearly done. Many Negroes dressed in gala attire had arrived. Then it began to pour. John strove valiantly with many volunteer helpers to keep the fires going, and finish the cooking, but in vain.

"Eve'ybody come over to our house," cried Sally, as she ran for shelter, "we gwine to have some Nineteenth after all."

Many followed her with feminine shrieks and male guffaws. John's house was crowded full of wet and draggled Negroes. But still they were in a crowd and it was still the Nineteenth, so that not all their merriment was drowned. The house was full to suffocation, but with the help of some of the male guests, Sally managed to clear a space at the back end of the open hall-way, and to place there the kitchen table. Soon she had installed Tom, her oldest brother, behind it, and was crying, "Come on, hyeer's yo' ice-cold soda-water, lemonade, and watermillon," for these dainties had not yet been carried to the pasture, "come on, buy 'em cheap an' fall back. De bobbycue'll be on hand toreckly."

But the crowd hung back. "Come on," cried Sally, "git 'em at half de reg'lar price. Two bottles of soda for five cents, two glasses of lemonade for a nickel, watermillon ten cents a slish."

The crowd came and bought. Sally and Tom were doing a rushing, if not profitable, business, when John, wet and dispirited, slunk in. Sally stopped for a moment to go to him and say, "Papa, go an' bring in some of de meat."

"But it ain't done, Sally?"

"Dat don't make no diffunce, we got to save whut we kin. Dey'll buy some of it at half de reg'lar price."

And so it turned out. Sally's enterprise saved the day in so far that they did sell enough to get back fifty dollars, and they had much meat and some soda-water left over.

It rained all day. At night-fall John sat on the front porch, downcast. Liza came out of the house. "Whut you settin' dar for?" she asked.

"I's plumb discouraged, Liza," said John.

"It's jes' like I told you," said Liza, "you never kin do nuthin' right."

"I has sich hard luck," complained John.

"Yas, dat's jest it," answered Liza, "you is de onluckiest nigger dey is. I ax myse'f, and I can't answer, whut I ever is married you for? You can't have no luck, an' you wouldn't know whut to do wid it if you had it." She turned scornfully and went into the house.

John was enveloped in gloom, but suddenly an idea occurred to him that brought some light. "How come Brother Mulberry cut de years off dem shotes? Unh-hunh! how does folks mark dey hogs? Dey cuts notches in dey years, dat's how dey marks 'em. If dem wuzn't Brother Mulberry's shotes, would he want 'em to have years? He wouldn't. Unh-hunh, I see. I got to git over to de lower place soon in de mawnin'."

Early on the morning of the nineteenth he was at

the lower place. He thought it best to call first on Uncle Sam Sparkins and inquire around a bit.

After they had exchanged salutations and commiserated with each other over the failure of the Nineteenth, John asked, "Well, Brother Sparkins, whut's the news over hyeer?"

"Dey ain't nuthin' much, Brother Ramsey, 'ceppen Mr. Sim Senter been raisin' sand all roun' hyeer 'bout his shotes."

"Whut's de matter wid his shotes, Brother Sparkins?"

"He say he is a-missin' two of 'em, an' dem de fattes' shotes he had."

"Is he layin' 'em to anybody special?"

"Naw, he 'jes' noratin' de word aroun' he gwine to send somebody to de pen if dem shotes don't show up."

"I 'speck dey jes' got out in de woods an' wondered off," said John with every appearance of indifference, "but I got to be hustlin' on. Take keer of yo'se'f, Brother Sparkins," and he was gone.

He carefully avoided the neighborhood of Sim Senter's house, and on arriving near Madison Mulberry's, he called from a little distance, "Hello! hello!" He received an almost immediate answer from within, and then said, "Come out hyeer, Brother Mulberry, I'se skeered of yo' dawgs. Dey's gwine on bodacious."

Madison came out, quieted the dogs, and asked, "Whut you want, Ramsey?"

"Come out hyeer, an' look at dis horse of mine, Brother Mulberry, 'pears to me like dey is somep'n ner de matter wid him."

Madison went in, got his hat, returned, and reluctantly came to where John was waiting.

"Less go out in de fiel' a little ways, Brother Mulberry, I wants to speak to you 'bout somep'n of a private nachur."

When they were removed quite out of earshot of the house, John said, "Brother Mulberry, dem shotes' years wuz wuth mor'n forty cents."

"Whut you mean, nigger?" asked Madison.

"Dey wuz wuth at de lowes' nine dollars an' fo' bits, an' nuthin' mo' said an' no feelin's hurt," answered John.

"Whut you talkin' bout?" asked Madison.

"Mr. Sim Senter say he missin' two of dem red Jersey shotes of his'n, but I done tol' him dey wuz lots of bristles left on dem shotes you sold me, an' dey wuz black. An' he say his shotes wuz marked wid a notch on bofe years. An' I tole him de shotes you brung me wuz marked wid a tip offen de left year and a slish in de right, dat's de way you mark yo' shotes, ain't it, Brother Mulberry?"

"Unh-hunh," said Madison, beginning to see the light.

"Waal, Brother Mulberry, does you want dem shotes to stay black wid a tip offen de left year an' a slish in de right?"

"Whut you drivin' at, nigger?"

"I'm drivin' at keepin' you outen de penitentiary at a cost to you of nine dollars an' fo' bits, Brother Mulberry."

"Hunh, I done spent all dat money," said Madison.

"Dat's bad, Brother Mulberry, dat sho' is powerful bad, 'cause it comes to me mighty strong dat de bristles on dem shotes wuz red an' dey didn't have no years at all, and it ain't so fur to Mr. Sim Senter's house dat I couldn't make it dar in about ten minutes."

Madison scratched his head. "How you know I ain't gwine to beat de life outen you, Ramsey?" he asked.

"I don't know it, Brother Mulberry, but I done tol' all my folks at home 'bout dis thing, so de fac's won't perish off de earth if anything happens to me."

"Waal, I ain't got but five dollars lef'," answered Madison.

John scratched his head. An inspiration came to him. "Waal, Brother Mulberry, whut do de Good Book say? It say, 'Be merciful to sinners,' so you kin jes' bring me de five dollars now, an' pay me de res' dis fall when you sell yo' crop."

Madison was cornered. Not knowing what else to do, he went and brought John the five dollars.

"So long, Brother Mulberry," said John, in leave-taking, "de way of de transgressor is hard, but blessed is de peace-makers, for dey shall see Gaad."

He rode to Compton to see Mr. Tony Peters.

"Mr. Tony," said he, "if it *is* Sunday, I done brung you forty dollars."

"What forty dollars?" asked Mr. Tony.

"De forty dollars I got from you on my team."

"Here's your note, John, and it says sixty."

"Yassuh, but you know I didn't git but de forty, an' de Nineteenth turned out somep'n awful, Mr. Tony."

"Yes that's so, John, but I've got to be paid for the risk I run. I can't be lettin' you niggers have money for nuthin'."

"Waal, you kin sho' knock off somep'n, can't you, Mr. Tony?"

"I hate to set a bad example," answered Mr. Peters, "but considerin' the circumstances, I'll knock off ten per cent. for cash. Pay me fifty-four dollars, and we'll call it square, John."

"Can't you do no better'n dat, Mr. Tony?"

"No, that's the best I'll do, and you better thank your stars for that."

Painfully he counted out the fifty-four dollars and handed the sum to Mr. Tony.

On his way home John rode bowed over nearly double. He reached in his pocket, pulled out a lone silver dollar, and looked at it mournfully. "You sho' is lonesome, ain't you, honey?" he said. Then he brightened up as he reflected, "It sho' wuz a good thing dat Brother Mulberry took dem shotes from Mr. Senter kinder—kinder unbeknownst like." Then another cloud came over his fáce. "But whut is I gwine to do 'bout dat ten dollars I got from Mr. Will? Oh, shuckins, I can't be worried 'bout dat. I knows I kin git him to wait on dat little smidget of money till de fall. Hunh, dey ain't nobody kin fool 'long wid dis nigger, I suttinly did stick it tight to Brother Mulberry, haw! haw! haw! I got him whar de hair is short. I'm mighty nigh got him whar dey ain't no hair at all. Haw! haw! haw!"

CHAPTER XIV

IMMEDIATELY after dinner on Sunday afternoon, Bob said to his father and mother, "I believe I'll ride down to the lower place to see how Jim Senter is getting on."

"I would have gone down before now," said Mr. Robertson, "but Dr. Anderson told me that he was improving right along and that he would likely be out of bed in a few days now. Still I think it would be a good idea for you to go, Bob."

"Yes, but wouldn't it be a better idea to wait till later in the evening? It is so fearfully hot now," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, Mama, won't you ever, ever get over thinking I'm a baby!" exclaimed Bob, petulantly.

"Mind, son, you shouldn't speak in that tone to your mother," said Mr. Robertson.

"Well, I don't mean to hurt anybody's feelings, but I get so mortally tired of it," and Bob flung out of the house.

"There seems to me to be something the matter with Bob here lately," said Mrs. Robertson with tears in her eyes. "What do you think, Will?"

"It may be," answered Mr. Robertson, "that we do regard him too much as a child. We shall have to remember, I suppose, that he is past eighteen, and is really a young man, though it is hard to think of him as nearly grown."

"It has been such a short, short time, Will, since I carried him in my arms."

"Yes, honey, I know, but it seems a long time to Bob, and a boy must have some freedom."

"Oh, Will, you don't think I nag him, do you?"

"No, no, honey, of course not, but suppose we give him his head a little more and see how that will turn out."

"All right, I'll try. I'll try hard, but if anything were to happen to him, Will, I—I couldn't stand it," she said with a sob.

When Bob rode up on Saladin to Sim Senter's house, he found a Sabbath calm prevailing. Sim himself was dozing in a dilapidated rocking-chair on the front porch, under the edge of which were groups of sleeping dogs.

"Hello, Mr. Senter," he called from the front gate, "taking a nap?"

"Unh-hunh," answered Sim sleepily, then waking up, as the dogs began to bark, he said, "Well, I declar' if it ain't Bob Robertson! Git down, Bob, an' come in."

"Thought I'd drop by and see how Jim is getting on," answered Bob, as he dismounted.

"He'll be real glad to see you, Bob, he's that pyeert now, he kin set up an' talk to folks. Hey, Jennie," he called to his wife, "you and Susie look out, Bob Robertson's comin' in to see Jim."—"I expect the women folks haven't got on much," he said to Bob in a lower voice. "They've been a-nappin' it, an' it is so 'tarnally hot."

"I'll wait a minute then," said Bob as he heard a rustling and a smothered tittering in the house and a slamming of a door.

"Yes, I expec' you'd better," said Sim, "set down in that cheer. How's Mr. Will and how's your ma?"

Bob flushed at the last query, remembering his former

encounter with Harry, but knowing that Mr. Senter had no such idea in mind, he answered, "They are well, thank you. I'm mighty glad to know that Jim is so much better."

"All right, he kin come," Mrs. Senter called from within the house.

Bob and Sim went into the room where Jim lay. After they had talked for some minutes, mainly about the Nineteenth and the fizzle of John Ramsey's celebration, at which both Sim and Jim rejoiced, Bob asked "Where's Harry?"

"Oh, he lit out soon this mawnin'," said Sim, "he said he wuz goin' over to the Piney Woods church. They're havin' preachin' over there to-day, an' I reckon he's been skylarkin' aroun' with some of the gals sence church let out. Most likely been takin' dinner with the Biggerses. I think he's kinder stuck on Leilia Biggers."

"He told me," said Jim, "he'd mighty nigh as soon marry her as not."

"That's the way of it," said Sim, "you don't no sooner git a boy up big enough to he'p you some 'n he gits marryin' in his head. Raisin' chillun don't pay in these times. Harry may not be back hyeer before midnight."

Bob thought how his father and mother would feel if he should go away early in the morning and not return till midnight without their knowing where he was, and he envied Harry. But he said merely, "Well, I've got to be going. I am glad you are getting on so fine, Jim."

"You ain't seen nuthin' of two red Jersey shotes over your way, have you?" asked Sim.

"No, I haven't," answered Bob. "Have you lost any?"

"Two of my best shotes air missin'," said Sim. "Some

of these low-down niggers must ha' stole 'em, an' I've got a putty good idee of which one it is."

"I hope you catch him," said Bob, and took his departure.

As he glanced back over his shoulder, he saw Susie come out on the front porch. She was dressed in her poor Sunday best, or so it seemed to him, but her awkward overgrown figure, stooping shoulders, sallow and pimply complexion, and discolored teeth were brought out but the more vividly by her wretched attempt at finery.

"Good-by, Bob," she said, with abashed sprightliness.

"Good-by, Susie," he half turned, waved his hand, hurried to mount, and rode away. "Goodness! I feel sorry for her!" he thought.

He concluded he would ride by Uncle Sam Sparkins's house and have a chat with him. There had been a mutual affection between them ever since Bob's babyhood. But as he was threading the narrow path that led through a patch of timber, he came face to face with Harry Senter, who was riding a dun pony. Bob's face went red, and "Now or never" came into his mind.

"Are you going to take back what you said about me last week?" he asked menacingly as he brought his horse beside Harry's.

"I don't never take nuthin' back," answered Harry, flaring up.

"Well, take that!" exclaimed Bob, and struck him across the neck and shoulders with his quirt.

Instantly Harry jerked his feet from his stirrups and threw himself on Bob, dragging him from the saddle to the ground. "I'll pay you, I'll pay you, damn you, I'll pay you good and plenty," he shrieked.

On the ground they tossed and tumbled, first one on top, then the other. There were no rules to the fight. They gouged and scratched and bit and pummeled as the chance came. Bob felt that at all hazards he must win, for he was fighting not only Harry Senter but all who taunted him for a mollycoddle. While in Harry surged up the envy and hatred of poverty for superior wealth and position.

But victory was to come to neither, for Sim Senter was following Bob on foot, intending to have another talk with Uncle Sam about the shotes.

After a struggle he succeeded in separating the combatants just as Uncle Sam arrived leading Saladin, who had run riderless up to the cabin.

"Here, Sam," said Sim, "hold Bob, while I tend to Harry. Now, what's the trouble?"

"He hit me with his quirt," said Harry, "and I'm goin' to kill him." He strained to break Sim's hold.

"I reckon he won't call me a baby any more," said Bob, "look at his eye. Turn me loose, Uncle Sam, and I'll beat him to death."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Sim, "is that what you two wuz fightin' about? Haw! haw! haw!"

"Shut up!" shouted Bob. "I'll lick you too! I'll lick the whole damn works!"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Sim. "Hold him, Sam, till I git done laughin'." And it looked as if he really could not control his mirth. "Me and Mr. Will had a fight about the same thing when we wuz boys! Haw! haw! haw!"

Bob was interested in spite of himself. "Who licked?" he asked.

"I licked, but I never did call him a baby no more. He bruised me up somethin' terrible."

"Papa, did you sho' nuff lick Mr. Will?" asked Harry, with great animation.

"He did for a fac'," said Uncle Sam, "I holp wash Mr. Will up atterwards. Haw! haw! haw! But I bet you got a scar right now behin' you' lef' year, Mr. Senter."

"Yep, there it is," said Sim proudly, pulling his ear forward and turning around for Bob and Harry to see.

"Well, I declare!" said Bob.

"Swar to goodness!" exclaimed Harry.

"Come on, honey, by de cabin," said Uncle Sam to Bob, "an' lemme wash you up like I done yo' pappy."

Bob looked at Harry sheepishly. "So long, Harry," he said.

"So long, Bob," Harry replied, "it feels to me like it's goin' to be my eye 'stead of my year."

"And I reckon it'll be my lip," said Bob, wiping the blood from his mouth.

After Uncle Sam and Aunt Hannah had done the best they could for Bob, he started back home, but in a bruised and battered condition. His lip was split, one eye was almost closed up, both of his thumbs were swollen, and it hurt him to sit in the saddle. Nevertheless there was a feeling of joy in his heart. "Papa and Mr. Senter had a fight about the same thing; how funny!" he thought, "and then he didn't call him a baby any more. Well, I'm free of that, I bet!"

But the word "free" turned his mind back to his adventure with Sally, to which he had been impelled in part by a desire for freedom. And he was conscious that he had been much less free after than before. The fear of its

discovery by his father or mother at times chilled him with horror. He was uneasy in the presence of John Ramsey and greatly embarrassed by the new assertiveness of Sally. And his conscience hurt him. And in addition to all of that he was plagued by unruly desires more than ever before in his life. Negro women looked different to him.

As his thought ran confusedly on such a course, he said half aloud, "I believe I will stop by Joe Williams's house and get some of that liniment for my thumbs. Maybe I will look better if I don't go home for an hour or so yet."

And then distinctly there recurred to him his dream of Ella standing in the brilliant sunshine and holding in her outstretched yellowish palm the glittering medal. It was odd that it was the dream, and not the actual scene itself, that was reproduced in his mind, for in the dream Ella stood bare-headed and her hair was long and wavy. While in reality Ella's hair was short and kinky, and at that time she had worn a sun-bonnet. It came to him as a shock that the dream had crowned Ella with the tresses of Minnie Deane.

When he reached the house of Joe Williams, Joe was not at home, but Malviny came out on the porch to his call.

"Lawd, Mr. Bob, whut's de matter wid you?" she asked.

"I had a fight with Harry Senter and I was wondering if Joe had any of that liniment left that Papa gave him for the mule's back."

"Yas, we's got plenty of it. Will you git down?" but there was a sort of reluctance in Malviny's manner.

"I believe I will," said Bob. "I will come on the porch and let you put some of the liniment on my thumbs."

"Ella, Ella," called Malviny, "bring dat liniment Mr. Will give us out hyeer to de po'ch."

Soon Ella came out with the medicine. "What man is that I hear talking in there?" asked Bob.

"Dat's Brother Richard Sanders, our new paschur," answered Malviny, "you ain't never met him, is you, Mr. Bob?"

"No, I never saw him, I think," said Bob, "he has been away to college, hasn't he?" And he smiled, his cut lip making him wince.

"Yassuh, he's been way up Nawth, to de theology seminary," said Ella.

"Oh, he has!" said Bob. "What's he doing over here?"

"He jes' drapped in to make us a paschural call," answered Malviny, and Bob understood the reluctance that there had been in Malviny's manner.

"Hyeer, Ella," said Malviny, "you rub Mr. Bob's thumb, while I go and git a rag."

"How do you like your new pastor, Ella?" asked Bob, grinning.

"Oh, I ain't studyin' him, Mr. Bob. It's Lucindy he likes."

Just then Richard, taking his leave, came out on the porch, Lucindy following him.

"Dis is Mr. Bob Robertson, Mr. Will's boy," said Ella, "an' dis is Brother Richard Sanders."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Robertson," said Richard, "I've heard what a fine young man you are."

Bob blushed and hardly knew what to say. It seemed to him that he was being patronized by a Negro, and he didn't look his best anyway, with his eye and lip in that condition and under treatment for his bruises gotten in

a fight on Sunday afternoon. But after some hesitation he did say, "I understand you've been off to college."

"Yes, sir, I have had that privilege, and I am come back to try to show my people the right path," answered Richard with politeness and some unction.

Lucindy giggled.

"Where are you going to work?" asked Bob.

"I am the pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church."

"Oh, you are not going to do anything but preach then?"

"No, sir, I expect all of my time to be occupied as the spiritual guide of my people."

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Bob.

Without answering, Richard left. Bob grinned. "The spiritual guide of his people!" he thought. "Ouch! Ella," he said aloud, "you twisted that thumb."

"I's sorry, Mr. Bob, it mus' be powerful so'."

Lucindy went back into the house with a cloudy face.

"It is mighty sore," said Bob.

"I would ax you who licked," said Ella, "but I know you can whup dat Harry Senter wid one hand tied behin' yo' back."

"Well, Mr. Sim stopped the fight before we finished," said Bob.

"And a good thing for Harry, I bet, too, or he wouldn't ha' stopped it."

"Oh, I don't know about that," answered Bob with the air of a conqueror.

Malviny came out with the rags and tied up Bob's thumbs. He mounted Saladin again and rode on towards home. As he went along his mind was busy. "Just think, that Richard Sanders has already been off to college. He talks like a white man. I bet he knows more

about books than I do. And he has been to places. Just think of that! But after all, wherever he went he wasn't anything but a nigger. He could go to forty colleges, but when he came back he would still be a nigger. Well, I better fool around the lot a while before I go to the house. It does take this swelling a long time to go down. Oh, Lord, I know I'll just scare Mama to death! And what is Papa going to say?"

He came to the spring branch. "Oh," he said, "I believe I'll go and sit down by the spring a while."

He turned his horse and rode up along the side of the branch. The spring itself was walled around with a board curbing, over the edge of which there ran a clear stream of water that sparkled as the rays of the sun fell on it here and there through the lofty pine trees by which it was surrounded. A little to one side was a rustic bench made of pine poles that had been built by Joe Williams as a place to rest and cool off when he would come from his work in the field to fill his jug of water. The bench was screened from observation by the high banks around it, and on it Bob stretched himself at full length with many a squirm, as various bruises on his body pressed upon its hard surface.

He fell to thinking about the fight, how he might have done this or that and knocked Harry completely out at once, but more insistent still was his worry as to how he should tell his father and mitigate the shock his mother would suffer. But he failed to realize how thoroughly exhausted he was, until all at once a feeling of extreme weariness came over him. "Gee! but I am tired!" he said, yawned, stretched, pillowed his head on his arm, and fell asleep. His hat dropped to the ground.

Ella came down to the spring for a bucket of water. She was humming a hymn:

> "'Why do you wait, dear brother?
> 'Oh, why do you tarry so long?'"

She saw Bob stretched out on the bench and realized that he was asleep. Her song was hushed. As quietly as possible she sank the bucket into the spring, lifted it out dripping, and turned to go back home, but diverged from the straight path enough to lay her hand gently for a moment on Bob's blond hair. He stirred in his sleep, and she stole away.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning Mr. Robertson went to town for the mail and returned early, as he was anxious to see how Bob would look. When he came back, the first question he asked was, "Mamie, how is Bob this morning?"

"Sh!" said Mrs. Robertson, "he hasn't waked up yet."

Bob had come in on the evening before at dusk, had had the good fortune to meet his father first, and had explained the fight to him. After his first alarm was over and Bob had assured him that there was no serious damage, Mr. Robertson was amused almost as much as had been Sim Senter. The adventures of his own youth were pleasantly recalled to him in the adventure of his boy. He gave so humorous an account of his own fight to Mrs. Robertson and made so light of Bob's bruises that she was less disturbed than Bob had ever hoped for. She even realized some of the trials that Bob had to suffer on account of his reputation as "a mama's boy," and she thought to herself, "Will is right. We must somehow let him have more freedom. Maybe I'm foolish about him. But I do love him so!"

Mr. Robertson began to open the mail. "Ah," he said, "here is another letter from Green & Porter, Cotton Factors, Mamie—let me see. Yes, it is the same old thing. They write me again to come to the City as their cotton buyer and grader. And they offer a salary of four thousand a year to begin with—and more, if I sell out here and put the proceeds into the business. I am almost

tempted. What do you think, Mamie? That's more than we have any assurance of making here."

"No, I don't know, Will, we've always lived here, and our people have lived here before us, and I love the place, and then about Bob. I don't think we ought to expose him to the temptations of a city."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Robertson, "like a woman to put her real thought in the postscript. Don't you think Bob is ever going to grow up?"

"Oh, Will," she answered, "not just yet. Let's don't risk it just yet a while."

"All right, honey, just as you say. But I don't think the temptations in the City are much worse than here. There are temptations everywhere if a man is disposed to get into trouble."

"Oh, Will, how can you say it? Think of the gambling and the drink and the women! We have real prohibition here, and I have heard you say myself that you don't know of a single loose woman in this community."

"I said white woman," answered Mr. Robertson.

"But, Will, Will, you don't think for a minute, you couldn't think—surely you have warned him about that!"

Bob came down for breakfast.

"Well, how's the warrior?" asked Mr. Robertson, grinning.

"Will, you are poking fun at him," said Mrs. Robertson, reproachfully.

"Oh, I'm all right and fit as a fiddle," answered Bob, feeling his eye, which was not so swollen, but greatly discolored. "But this eye looks funny, don't it?"

Mrs. Robertson restrained an impulse to kiss the injured member, and said, "I've got the nicest breakfast

for you." She stepped to the back door of the hall and called, "Cindy, Cindy, bring in Mr. Bob's breakfast."

"How are the thumbs?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"Nearly as good as new," said Bob, "but a little rusty in the joints."

"I remember now it was the big toe on my right foot," said Mr. Robertson. "I had to limp around for nearly a week. Ha! ha! ha! that was some fight. And how I did hate Sim before it came off! But afterwards Sim and I couldn't do enough for each other, and we've stuck together to this good day. Ah, lawzy me!"

Cindy came bringing in the breakfast. Mrs. Robertson could not resist putting an arm around Bob and walking with him into the dining-room.

"Good mawnin', Mr. Bob," said Cindy. "I hyeared you been whuppin' de life out of dat ar Harry Senter."

"No, Cindy, not as bad as that. It was a sort of draw between us."

"I boun' it wuz a draw," said Cindy, "I boun' you drawed de blood out of him."

"Run along, Cindy, and start on the batter-cakes," said Mrs. Robertson.

"I'm a-gwine, Miss Mamie, but dat ar Harry Senter ought to be ashamed of hisse'f a-bustin' Mr. Bob in de eye dat a-way."

Bob blushed, then said, "But you just ought to see *his* eye, Cindy."

"You give it to him, didn't you, Mr. Bob. Haw! haw! haw! I knows you give it to him hot and heavy."

But Bob began eating, so Cindy went out to cook his batter-cakes.

"They all love you, don't they, Bob?" said Mrs. Robertson.

"I don't know whether they love me so much or hate Harry," he answered, smiling, "but, gee! this lip of mine hasn't grown together good yet."

"Poor sweet lip!" said Mrs. Robertson, and Bob blushed again, but embarrassment was not unmixed with anger in his eyes.

"Papa got another letter this morning from Green & Porter, urging him to accept the position of head buyer and classer for them in the City," said Mrs. Robertson. "How would you like for us to sell out and move there, Bob?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mama. What I wouldn't like about it is that Papa would be working for somebody else. I don't like to think of anybody bossing Papa."

"But we would have more money, and if we could sell out here, Papa could buy a share in the business and be a member of the firm."

"That might be better, but still he would have to do what the others say. And then, Mama, would you like the idea of giving up this place? It has come down to us, you know."

"Oh, honey, the City has no attraction for you, then?"

"So, Mama, you were just trying to find that out, were you?"

Mrs. Robertson blushed. "Well, honey, you know I don't want to do anything except what is for your good."

"But if you could just leave me alone a little!" Bob exclaimed petulantly.

Tears stood in Mrs. Robertson's eyes. Cindy brought in the batter-cakes and went out again as she wanted to have words with Cyrus before he could escape to the field from which he had come for a drink of water.

Bob said, "Oh, well, it don't make any difference to

me. We'll go to the City or we'll stay here, just as you say." And he devoured the batter-cakes as rapidly as possible.

"Oh, Bob, Bob!" Mrs. Robertson exclaimed, reproachfully, as a tear ran down her cheek.

"Well, Mama, I don't want to hurt your feelings—I am always hurting your feelings—but what more can I say?"

"Honey, excuse me, I didn't mean—"

There was an uproar in the back-yard. Cindy's voice was crying, "And I says you did. And it's got to stop, nigger, it's got to stop!"

From Cyrus came, "Dey ain't no woman kin talk to me like dat. I'll bus' yo' head open wid—"

Mr. Robertson came running by the dining-room door, calling, "Stop that, Cindy! Stop that, Cyrus!"

Bob and his mother rushed to the back porch. Mr. Robertson was in the yard and was holding Cyrus by the collar of his shirt. "What on earth do you mean, raising such a row?" he cried angrily.

"Make Cindy lem'me 'lone, Mr. Will," said Cyrus, sullenly.

"What are you doing to him, Cindy?"

"I ain't doin' nuthin', Mr. Will. But he's got to leave Rosy alone."

"I ain't said fo' words to Rosy," declared Cyrus.

"You give her my bangle, dat's whut you done."

"I never!"

"You did!"

"Waal, whut's a little old bangle—"

"Cyrus, I am not going to have anything of that sort on this place," said Mr. Robertson sternly, "go this minute and get that bangle and bring it back to Cindy."

"Yassuh, Mr. Will, but how's I gwine to—"

"I don't know how you're 'gwine to,' you can steal it from her, for all I care." Then as if a comic side of the thing struck him, he smiled, broke into a laugh, and said, "Trot now, Cyrus."

Cyrus started to go, looked sheepishly at Mr. Will, then a gleam came into his eye, the corners of his mouth twitched, and he could not restrain a guffaw, "Haw! haw! haw!"

When he was out of hearing, Mr. Robertson said, "Cindy, Cyrus is a good-natured nigger and you'd better marry him as soon as possible."

"Hunh! Mr. Will, I never is gwine to marry dat nigger till he axes my pahdon," said Cindy, going back toward the kitchen.

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Robertson, laughing more heartily still, "I will make him give back your bangle and 'ax your pahdon,' too."

"Waal, suh, den dey may be somep'n doin'," answered Cindy with a toss of her head.

CHAPTER XVI

THURSDAY morning of the same week Mr. Robertson was sitting on the front porch reading the paper. There came walking to the house and on straight up into the porch a Negro of twenty-one or twenty-two, flashily dressed in bright yellow shoes, blue peg-topped trousers, striped shirt, flowing red tie, dazzling white collar, and stiff straw hat surrounded by a gaudy band of red, blue and yellow.

"Dey's got de ole man, an' he say come down dar an' git him out," he announced to Mr. Robertson.

"Pull off that hat," thundered Mr. Robertson at him.

The Negro jerked off his hat saucily.

"Don't you ever come into my house until I tell you, and then don't you come without pulling off your hat. You must be Madison Mulberry's boy."

"Yassuh, I'm Ulysses."

"You've been away for two or three years?"

"Yassuh, I been in de City," he answered with an air of importance.

"What have you been doing in the City?"

"I been workin', mostly in de railroad shops, an' I been gittin' my fo' dollars a day."

"I didn't ask you what you've been getting! What are you doing back here?"

"I los' my job. I wuzn't gwine to take nuthin' off dat fo'man—"

"Never mind about that. What did you come here to tell me?"

"Dey got de ole man in jail down here at Compton."

"Who? Madison?"

"Yassuh."

"What for?"

"Dey say he took some shotes b'longin' to Sim Senter."

"You mean Mr. Senter."

"Dey say he took 'em," repeated Ulysses, defiantly.

At that moment Bob came out on the porch. "Hello, Bob!" said Ulysses.

Bob flushed, but before he could say anything, Mr. Robertson commanded, "Address my son as Mr. Bob."

"Mis-ter Bob!" said Ulysses sneeringly.

Mr. Robertson had arisen and was standing near Ulysses. Quickly he seized the son of Madison by the shoulders, turned him around to face the front, and kicked him tumbling down the steps. "Get up from there and get out of this yard, you infernal scoundrel, and don't you ever set foot in it again." He stood glaring.

Ulysses picked himself up and limped out of the gate. Mr. Robertson and Bob watched him till he came to the road and turned toward John Ramsey's house.

"The impudent rascal, he'll cause trouble here yet. I ought to run him clear away."

"He ought to be beat till he couldn't stand up," said Bob.

"He will go over to John's now with a great tale, I reckon," said Mr. Robertson, and then his anger subsiding, he added, "and I imagine those clothes will cause quite a flutter in John's dove-cot, eh, Bob. Sally could hardly stand out against them, eh?"

For days thereafter Mr. Robertson wondered why Bob

blushed so intensely as he answered, "That nigger ought to be run out of this country, Papa. He is going to give us trouble."

"Yes, I expect he will," answered Mr. Robertson, "but tell Cyrus to saddle up our horses. They've got Madison in jail down there for stealing some hogs from Sim Senter. We had better go down and get him out, but I don't see why Sim didn't say something to me about it before he had him arrested. I don't like to have my niggers arrested and slapped in jail this way"

When they reached Compton they found Sim Senter outside of the office of the justice of the peace at the court house. "Sim, why didn't you say something to me about Madison before you had him arrested?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"I would have, Mr. Will, but that nigger sassed me somethin' awful, an' I come mighty nigh to killin' that Lys of his."

"How did it happen?"

"Well, Madison stold my two red Jersey shotes an' sold 'em to John Ramsey for the Nineteenth. I got the goods on him so he couldn't twist out of it. An' yestiddy evenin' I went over an' taxed him with it, and told him he had to pay me for them shotes or go to jail. He denied it, an' lit out to cussin'. An' that Lys come out and put in, an' said he wuzn't goin' to stand for no low down white trash accusin' his daddy of stealin', an' he cussed around, too. I didn't have no gun with me, an' I knowed they had, so I had to take what they said. I wuz so mad I didn't have right good sense, so the fust thing I thought of wuz to come up hyeer an' git the constable. So he went back with me an' we brought Madison up hyeer late

yestiddy evenin' an' put him in jail. An' I reckon it's a good thing after all, 'cause if I had ha' gone home an' told Harry about it, the upshot of it would ha' been that me an' Harry would ha' got our guns an' gone over there an' shot hell out of Madison and Lys both."

"Well, I reckon it is better so," said Mr. Robertson. "Madison is still in jail, then?"

"Yes, he's over there," answered Sim.

"You wouldn't mind my bailin' him out, would you, Sim? You see his crop has got to be worked some yet?"

"Naw, I wouldn't mind that so much, but you'd better tell him, Mr. Will, to stay over on his side of the place and not come nigh me or mine."

"I'll see to that," said Mr. Robertson. "Is Squire Meekin inside there?"

"Yes, he wuz jus' waitin' for you to come."

"All right, then we'll go in."

They went inside. "Good morning, Squire," said Mr. Robertson.

"Good mawnin', Will. And that's Bob, ain't it? How're you, Bob? We've got one of your niggers, Will."

"Yes, so I understand. I reckon there's no use in having an examining trial, Squire. He probably took the hogs, and I'll go his bail."

"Of course that'll be all right, Will," said Squire Meekin, and added, speaking to the constable, "Jim, run over and git Madison while I make out the bail bond. Two hundred dollars will be enough, I reckon. Is that all right, Will?"

"Yes, that's little enough, Squire," said Mr. Robertson, as the constable left to bring in the prisoner. And then he said to Sim, "Sim, would you mind stepping out-

side a while. I'd like to talk to Madison when they bring him in."

"You be sure to lay down the law to him, Mr. Will, for him to keep clear of me and mine," answered Sim, as he went out.

After a few minutes Madison was brought in. He and Mr. Robertson signed the bond.

"Now, look here, Madison," said Mr. Robertson, "you understand that I am getting you out of jail."

"Yassuh."

"I might let you stay there. And if I did, nobody else would bother about you. You understand that?"

"Yassuh."

"You are to appear here at the term of court that convenes on the first Monday in October, to be tried."

"Yassuh."

"In the mean time you are to stay on your own side of the place and you are to keep yourself and your folks away from Mr. Senter and his folks. If you are about to meet any of them in the road or anywhere, you turn clear out and give them the right of way, so that you won't meet 'em."

"Yassuh."

"As soon as you get home, you put Ulysses to work in the field or drive him off the place. I won't have him swelling around here. You understand that."

"Yassuh."

"If you don't do just as I say, I will turn you back to Squire Meekin to put you in jail again. Get that in your head and hold it there."

"Yassuh."

"What are you so sullen about?"

"I ain't sullen."

"You are, don't lie to me. You've got some devilment in your head right now, and I'm a mind to slap you back in jail for a week or so."

"Naw, suh, I ain't studdin' no devilment. I'm gwine to work my crop."

"Well, see that you do. I'll be over there to-morrow, and want to see you and Ulysses both hard at it."

"Yassuh. Is you white folks done wid me?"

"Yes, go on home," said Mr. Robertson.

After he had left, Squire Meekin said, "Watch out, Will, you're goin' to have trouble with that nigger."

"Yes, I wish I had gotten rid of him long ago," answered Mr. Robertson. "He probably stole the hogs all right, and they will send him to the pen this fall, and then I'll have his old woman and kids on my hands to take care of."

"I believe her and the chillun would make a better crop without him," said the squire, "if you could git shut of that Ulysses."

"I'm going to run him out of the country," answered Mr. Robertson. Then he added, speaking to Bob, "Son, I wish you'd skip over to the post-office and get the mail, I want to go and see Mr. Hiram Shorter about Madison's account."

On his way to the post-office, Bob met Minnie Deane.

She said, "Hello, Bob," her brown eyes dancing with pleasure at the meeting, "where have you been all this time, and what have you been doing?"

"Hello, Minnie," answered Bob with some embarrassment. "I haven't been doing anything much."

"Oh, yes, you have, I bet you've been up to some mischief," and she laughed merrily.

Bob blushed, and his glance dropped as the vivid recollection of the mischief flashed into his mind, and with it there came a keen consciousness of Minnie's sex. Hitherto his feeling about her had been vague, a nebulous haze of sentiment. He thought her very pretty, very sweet, very attractive, and as somehow enshrined in his holy of holies. It had been his custom to think of her as becoming his wife after a number of years, but even then his imagination had pictured her as a sort of saintly virgin wearing an aureole of purity, and as walking by his side guiding him on his way to things high and noble. Actually and consciously to connect the physiological fact of sex with her had not occurred to him. But now an indelicate picture of reality marred that vision. An evil light shone upon the haze, dissolving it, and she stood there a female.

"Oh, I haven't been doing anything," he said clumsily.

Minnie laughed. "As if you ever could get into any real mischief! But I hear you have got to be a slugger, a regular Jim Corbett, or is it Mr. Fitzsimmons I am talking to?"

"Not much of either, I reckon," said Bob aloud with a self-conscious grin, but it was as if he were whispering to himself, "They are all alike, all alike," and a feeling of dismay and shame mixed with a leering exultation came over him.

"There is something the matter with you, Bob!" exclaimed Minnie, " I believe the truth is you were licked!" She laughed teasingly, then instantly her countenance changed. "Oh, Bob, you were not really hurt, were you?"

"Oh, no," said Bob, pulling himself out of his abstraction, "it didn't amount to anything. They separated us."

"Tell me about it, Bob."

"Oh, it wasn't anything. I got my lip split, so I couldn't laugh much for a day or two, and my eye bunged up, but they are well now."

"I wonder if laughing was all that lip interfered with," said Minnie archly.

"Well, I couldn't eat so good," answered Bob.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Minnie, "did you fall off much during that time?"

"Oh, shucks!" said Bob, "let's go by the drug-store and get some soda-water."

They walked down the street together, Minnie chattering gaily and feeling proud to exhibit Bob, as it were, in a certain thralldrom before the eyes of the townspeople. But Bob was thinking, "If she knew everything and everybody else knew it, I wonder if she would walk along here with me. And if she knew it and nobody else did, I wonder what she would do. Oh, it is shameful for me even to think of her knowing it! Oh, she never had a thought about such a thing in her life—and yet, and yet—oh, I wish I never had done it."

For a moment he felt downcast, quite humiliated, then there stole into him again that curious exultation that he knew was evil, but that he could not find it in his heart utterly to repress.

In the meantime Ulysses had brushed himself off with a large purple-bordered handkerchief, had smoothed his rumpled attire, recovered his jaunty air of self-assurance, and arrived at John Ramsey's house.

The first person he saw was Sally. She was standing on the front porch. "Hello, Sally," he said, "whar's yo' paw?"

"He's down in de fiel'," she answered. Then looking at him more closely, she exclaimed, "Waal, if dat ain't Lys! Lawd sakes! Lys, whar did you come from?"

"I come from de City. I wouldn't stay in no little ole hole like dis hyeer Compton."

"How you is dressed up!"

"Hunh, I been whar dey is money, loose money, plenty of it."

"Is you got much of it wid you?" asked Sally, laughing shrilly.

"I got jes' enough not to be givin' none of it away," he answered mockingly. Then another idea seemed to strike him, his expression changed, and he said, "Sally, you's a good-lookin' chicken. If you'll go back to de City wid me when I goes, I'll show you whar de money is."

"Hunh, nigger, you don't ketch me runnin' roun' de country wid no triflin' trash like you."

Rosy came out on the porch. "Hello, Lys," she said.

"Hello, yo'se'f, Rosy," answered Lys, "how's you gittin' on?"

"You needn't to be talkin' to Sally 'bout goin' anywhar wid you," said Rosy. "She's a-flyin' at high game dese times, de highest game dey is," and she laughed maliciously.

"Hunh, dey ain't no high game roun' hyeer," sneered Ulysses.

"Dey's a lots higher dan whut you is," answered Sally.

"How high you think Mr. Bob is?" asked Rosy.

"Mister Bob? Shucks! I calls him Bob. He ain't knee high to a duck. Dat's how high he is. I bet his daddy don't give him a dollar a week."

Sally was somewhat taken aback, but she managed to

answer, "Waal, nemmine, I knows whut I knows. But whut did you come hyeer for?"

"Oh, dey got my ole man in jail down yonder for takin' some shotes from Sim Senter, and he say for me to tell yo' paw he better swear right when de time come."

"Dey got him, is dey," said Sally, "an' I boun' it ain't gwine to be long befo' dey got you, too."

"Dey ain't never gwine to git me," answered Ulysses, "but you better tell yo' paw to look out, my ole man'll git him if he don't swear right. An' he ain't all we gwine to git, neither."

"You talkin' mighty big," said Sally.

"Big or little, you jes' look out," he said, turning to go. "Hunh! *Mister* Bob! Dey thinks dey kin go on runnin' over us, but I'll show 'em, jus' you wait, I'll show 'em!"

CHAPTER XVII

On the following Sunday Brother Maxcy and the presiding elder, Brother Moreton, who was a sort of ecclesiastical supervisor, came to dinner with the Robertsons. Sister Maxcy was away on a visit to her people in West Texas. It was the time for the quarterly conference to meet in Compton, and Brother Moreton had stayed over to preach the Sunday morning sermon.

At the table the talk turned on the spiritual condition of the community. Brother Moreton, being as one in authority, held forth. "Sin is rampant everywhere. When I look about me, I am appalled. Men will not take the gospel and apply it to their hearts and conduct. I labor in the vineyard of the Lord till I am exhausted, and, still, dancing and card-playing and horse-racing and 'Sassiety' go on in their mad race. I ask you, Sister Robertson, as a good Christian woman, what would become of the world if it wasn't for the poorly paid, self-denying ministers of the gospel?"

"Oh, probably we are paid as much as we are really worth," interposed Brother Maxcy. "Many of us accomplish very little, God knows, in the way of holy living."

"How can you say such a thing, Maxcy, and in the presence of Brother Bob, too? Will you teach our Christian young men to fail in reverence for the ministers of God?"

Mr. Robertson hastened to say, "I am sure our ministers are not paid near enough."

And Mrs. Robertson, "I know Bob never will fail in reverence for a minister of the gospel. Why, Brother Moreton, he never has danced a step and he doesn't know one card from another."

"It rejoices me to know, Sister Robertson, that one young man, and him a scion of one of our most prominent families materially as well as spiritually, is being brought up as a true Christian."

"And he experienced such a bright conversion at our last revival, Brother Moreton."

"Oh, I heard of it, and it filled my heart with joy, a deep spiritual joy, to know that one who is to be endowed with this world's goods that might have proved a snare to him, a sinful, wicked, deceitful snare, had confessed his Savior and surrendered all on His altar. Oh, he will be a pillar of the church, a glorious pillar of the church like his father before him!"

Brother Maxcy saw that Bob was feeling very uncomfortable, so to change the subject, remarked, "I hear you have been having some trouble among your tenants, Brother Robertson."

"Yes, a hog-stealing case, but I suppose it is settled until court now. And I reckon I can get Madison off with the lowest sentence. You know it's sorter natural for a nigger to steal shotes, especially when there is to be a Nineteenth celebration and he hasn't got any money."

"Yes, I suppose so, the poor things," said Brother Maxcy.

"Well, I don't know," Brother Moreton took the word, "an example has to be made. They must be taught to respect the rights of property. 'Thou shalt not steal' is as important a commandment as any other, I apprehend. Brother Robertson, you stewards and official members

should set an example of law enforcement, so that the terrors of the law may restrain evil-doers. Was it your hogs he stole, Brother Robertson?"

"No, they belonged to Sim Senter, a white tenant of mine."

"Oh," said Brother Moreton, "well, anyway, he ought to be punished."

"That's what I tell Papa," Bob found courage to say, "but he's so tender-hearted."

"Yes, I believe Will would give everything he has to the niggers if he had his way about it," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, no, not so bad as that," answered Mr. Robertson, "but Brother Moreton, did you ever have a sort of feeling that really it is unjust for some of us to live in abundance and others to have so little, and especially when those others do the actual work?"

"No, no, Brother Robertson, that's flying in the face of Providence. The good Lord distributes his abundance as he divinely sees fit. To some he gives ten talents, to others one, and blessed be His will."

"I have a sort of sneaking notion," said Mr. Robertson, "that men have a good deal to do with the distribution."

Brother Maxcy laughed, but Brother Moreton looked more serious than ever and said, "It is through just such doors that socialism and anarchism and a thousand other pernicious isms seek to enter Christian hearts, Brother Robertson. Let Christians give of their substance to the church of God, and that church will sufficiently care for the poor and needy. Oh, why are men so hard of heart and will not contribute joyfully, abundantly of their means to the church of the living God?"

He glared around impressively, and Mr. Robertson felt abashed, as if he were not giving enough to the church. He resolved to think about increasing his contribution, but found himself asking, "Brother Moreton, what do you think about niggers in Heaven? Will they be like us there?"

"It is not given me to know," answered Brother Moreton, "but I do know that the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ can wash away all impurities of sin, why not then of color?"

"But aren't those impurities of sin washed away here and now?"

"Yes, most certainly they are, and through the divine process of conversion we are made pure and undefiled. And—and—but—but with color somehow it is different," he finished lamely.

Brother Maxcy said, "Doesn't the fact seem to be that if God had wanted us to associate here intimately and on terms of equality with niggers, that he would have made them more like us or us more like them? And isn't it our duty to act in accord with known facts, leaving the unknown future to take care of itself under the guidance of God?"

"Yes, yes, certainly," answered Brother Moreton, "but you don't mean to say that the future of God's children is unknown?"

"Oh, I merely mean to say that I don't know whether niggers are going to be made white in Heaven or not, and," he continued with spirit, "I don't believe anybody else does."

"Oh, no, no, certainly not, but then they may be."

"Well, I hope they will be," said Brother Maxcy, "and one thing is certain, they've got to be, if I associate with

'em on terms of equality. The only way they ever can be made white here is by hundreds of years of miscegenation, and I don't fancy the process!"

If Sister Maxcy had been present, she might have been gratified to see her saint angry at least once. But his heat arose really out of the circumstance that he distrusted and disliked Brother Moreton, believing him to be a hypocrite. And, indeed, he had gone much further than he had intended at the outset.

Brother Moreton held up his hand. "To think of using such a word in the presence of Brother Bob and Sister Robertson," he said in a tone of rebuke. "I am humiliated, mortified!"

"If we had more plain speaking, we might have more righteous acting," snapped Brother Maxcy, realizing that Brother Moreton had put him at a disadvantage.

"Ah, well," said Mr. Robertson, smiling, "there's plenty of room for more righteous acting. But I move we adjourn to the hall," and he rose from his seat, the meal having been finished.

Mrs. Robertson stayed in the dining-room to see about the putting away of her best napkins and silver that were brought out only on special occasions. The men took seats in the hall for a smoke, and Bob escaped from the company of the preachers, by alleging that he had to go and see if the horses had had their noon watering.

"As only we are present," said Brother Moreton, "and as I am deeply interested in the spiritual improvement of this and the other communities in my district, I should like to ask if illicit relations between white men and Negro women are as frequent here as ever, or is there an improvement in the conduct and sentiment of the people?"

"I think there is some improvement," said Mr. Robertson. "It doesn't seem to me to be so common as it used to be. What do you think about it, Brother Maxcy?"

"I agree with you," answered Brother Maxcy, "although there is only too much of it still."

"Is it not true, Maxcy, that Brother Hiram Shorter, who sings in your choir, is suspected of such relations?"

"It is more than a suspicion. It amounts to quite positive knowledge," answered Brother Maxcy.

"Is the—ah—woman young or particularly attractive looking?"

"Well, yes, the present one is young, and for a nigger, attractive looking. She is Rosy, a daughter of one of Brother Robertson's tenants, and she is a bright mulatto."

"Ah, a bright mulatto, is she? And may I ask if there have been or are to be any—ah—ah—consequences of this relation?"

"Well, I have been told that she is soon to have a baby," answered Brother Maxcy.

"Umph-hunh! And how do you reconcile those facts with the fact that such a debauchee is permitted to sing in your choir?"

"Oh, Mr. Hiram is not a debauchee," said Mr. Robertson, laughing. "Ha! ha! ha! the idea of Mr. Hiram being a debauchee!"

"Well, what would you call him, Brother Robertson?" And Brother Moreton pursed up his lips as if he had asked a poser.

"I don't know exactly," he answered, still smiling, "what would you call him, Brother Maxcy?"

"I would call him first a kind-hearted human being, second, a good bookkeeper, third, a polite and considerate gentleman, fourth, a mighty poor singer, and fifth, a sin-

ner who needs a lot of sympathy and tactful guidance," answered Brother Maxcy with a smile on his lips, but with a gleam of defiance in his eye.

"His singing doesn't then—ah—contribute to the—ah —harmony of your choir?" asked Brother Moreton.

"No, rather interferes with it than otherwise, I think. But it is so bad anyway that I don't think it makes much difference."

"And your idea of sympathy and tactful guidance is to let him continue to sing in the choir?"

"Partly that," answered Brother Maxcy.

"But have you not thought of the devastating effect that such an example, receiving as it were the endorsement of the church, is bound to have on the morals of the young men of the community?"

"Yes, I have thought of that."

"Well, how do you explain your attitude? I am sure that the Bishop will be interested to hear."

"I haven't explained it."

"Perhaps you will have the kindness, then, to explain it now."

"Oh, what's the use?" And Brother Maxcy threw out his hands in a petulant gesture. "But I might as well. Knowing Mr. Hiram Shorter's character and history as I do, I think the one thread binding him to religion is his singing in the choir, and I am unwilling to cut that thread, even at the risk of possible injury to some young men. By not cutting it I think I shall save Mr. Hiram, by cutting it I don't know that I would save anybody."

"And yet he is practising the very miscegenation that you condemn so violently?"

"Yes, he is."

"The thing about Brother Maxcy," interposed Mr.

Robertson, "is that he condemns the sin, but he loves the sinner. We all know that, and we would do anything in reason for him."

Brother Maxcy jerked out his handkerchief and blew his nose violently and dabbed at his eyes two or three times, although up to then he had shown no signs of a cold.

"Would it be in reason for Mr. Hiram Shorter to give up that practice for him?" asked Brother Moreton.

"Well, yes, in time it will, I am sure it will," answered Mr. Robertson, "if nobody interferes and goes to lecturing Mr. Hiram or turning him out of the choir. But it will take some time."

"Well, maybe, we had better return Maxcy to this charge next year for Mr. Hiram's sake," said Brother Moreton sarcastically.

"By all means, for all our sakes," said Mr. Robertson with enthusiasm.

Compton was not a desirable station, so there was a gleam of satisfaction in Brother Moreton's eye as he said, "I shall certainly recommend that to the Bishop. And by the way, Bishop Macdonald is to have charge of this Conference next fall, and if I do say it, I am his most trusted adviser. In the Cabinet he always asks my opinion first."

"But speaking of miscegenation, Brother Moreton," said Mr. Robertson, "I understand that you have preached in various parts of Texas and indeed in many different sections of the South, and I should like to know if you think it is as common elsewhere as in our immediate community."

"Well, yes and no," answered Brother Moreton. "Wherever niggers are in the majority, or at least in

large numbers, it is very common, particularly in the rural districts. I say particularly in the rural districts, because in the cities the contact between white and black is hardly so close, and then besides in the cities I am sorry to say that there are generally many white women of ill-repute. And other things being equal, of course a sinful white man would prefer a white woman."

"And what do you think will be the cure for it, if there is any cure?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"The same cure as for all of the sins of humanity, the church of the living God," proclaimed Brother Moreton with emphasis, "but the trouble is that our laymen withhold their means from the treasury of the Lord, and so the power of the church is crippled."

"I don't believe that is the reason," said Brother Maxcy, "if the church had forty times as much money, that still would not effect a cure."

"Well, what in the name of common sense do you believe is the reason, Maxcy?"

"I think it is a whole lot of things, the comparative defenselessness of niggers, passion and vanity in black women, lust in white men, timidity, poverty, and lack of faith in the teaching of the church."

"Well, how are you going to cure them unless you have more money to build more churches, to hire more and better preachers, to spread the gospel? Answer me that."

"For one thing I think there should be a reformation in the church beginning at the top. First we ought to clean our own house."

"Do you mean to accuse our bishops and connectional officers and presiding elders and prominent ministers with laxness or dissoluteness or corruption? Do you mean

that?" exclaimed Brother Moreton, losing his temper altogether.

"I don't mean to accuse anybody of anything, and, of course, not the ministry of miscegenation," answered Brother Maxcy. "You asked me what I thought and I told you. But a blind man could see that when it comes to any real self-denial, we don't practise what we preach. We are as avid of money as anybody and as servile before it. We are like ordinary politicians, we plot and scheme for personal preferment. We seek power, not holiness, and we make piety a mask for that seeking."

Before Brother Moreton could answer, Mr. Robertson interposed. "Brother Moreton, I am anxious to know what you think about the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. They seem to be spreading throughout the South and indeed the papers say there are many branches in the North, too."

"Yes, I have noticed," said Brother Moreton, glaring at Brother Maxcy, "I have noticed. And I am not sure it wouldn't be a good thing for them to operate in this community. I haven't heard of where they have punished anybody but evil-doers. And they seem to have made a specialty of people like Mr. Hiram Shorter, Maxcy's great friend. One thing certain is that their treatment would cure him of miscegenation more effectually than ten years of singing in the choir." He chuckled, "Yes, that would cure him."

"But, Brother Moreton, surely you do not realize how such activity as theirs flouts all law, disregards every civil right of a citizen, denies and tramples upon the guarantees of our constitutions, state and national, substitutes the savagery of a mob for ordered judicial pro-

cesses, and, if unchecked, will plunge us back into barbarism!" said Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, Brother Robertson, I think you take the matter too seriously. They are not going to harm anybody like you or me or Maxcy. And there are offenses that the law don't seem to reach."

"Why not revive the Holy Inquisition and be done with it?" asked Brother Maxcy. "That was at least in the hands of the church."

"Well," began Brother Moreton angrily, but he was interrupted by the coming of Mrs. Robertson, which turned the talk to other matters.

In the course of the ensuing conversation Brother Moreton took occasion to say, "Sister Robertson, I have resolved on my rounds this year to make the subject of family prayer my special province. I know it is hardly necessary for me to inquire about this family, for I am sure that you gather around the family altar night and morning for the reading of the Word and for communion with our heavenly Father."

Mrs. Robertson blushed, hung her head, and cast an embarrassed look at her husband, "Well, I—I—" she stammered.

Mr. Robertson came to her relief, but there was a guilty look in his eye as if he had committed a crime or been guilty of a great dereliction. "No, Brother Moreton, the fact is," he said, "that for a while after the last revival we had family prayers of mornings, but, but we didn't all get up at the same time, and—er—it wasn't very convenient, so we just kinder fell out of the way of it."

"I'm grieved, truly grieved to hear it, Brother Robertson. And—and, Maxcy, I suppose the institution of family prayer is not generally observed in your charge."

"No, I don't think it is," answered Brother Maxcy, and he added defiantly, "nor in any other charge nowadays."

"Please do not assume to speak about other charges too certainly, Maxcy. There is danger of misrepresentation where the facts are not known."

Without answering, Brother Maxcy rose from his seat, went out to the front porch, and walked up and down it, gazing over hill and dale of the farms spread out before him. But in the bright sunshine of the Sabbath afternoon his eyes seemed to see a dark mist lowering above the smiling land.

When the ministers were gone, Mr. Robertson said to his wife, "Mamie, you know I'm not a profane man, but I'll be damned if that Moreton shall ever set his foot in this house again!"

"But, Will, he is our presiding elder."

"I don't care if he is our President-elect, the outside of this house is all he will ever see!"

CHAPTER XVIII

At dusk on Tuesday, after the day's work was over, Joe Williams came to have a talk with Mr. Robertson. He stood respectfully at the front steps with his hat off, saying, "Mr. Will, I wants to speak to you about a matter."

"All right, Joe," answered Mr. Robertson, who was sitting on the porch, "sit down on the step there and tell me about it."

"Waal, suh, our new paschur say de Shady Grove Church house is a disgrace to de Babtis' religion, an' he say we must make it bigger an' fix it up. An' he got de plans all ready, an' it will cost a thousand dollars."

"And you want me to subscribe something?" said Mr. Robertson, smiling.

"Waal, suh, you see dey done 'pinted a committee to collect, and I's de cheerman of de committee, and of co'se I got to git up de most of any of 'em. An' de paschur say go to de bes' ones fust and let dem set a high water mark for de others to come up to, so I come to you de ve'y fust one of all."

"That's the speech of a diplomat, Joe, I congratulate you."

"Yassuh, when Christ's disciples needed anything, dey always come a-runnin' to de Master fust off, an' dat's whut I'm a-doin', Mr. Will."

"Well, now, Joe, that's putting it pretty strongly. I couldn't possibly get out of giving you something now, could I? Your new 'paschur' has a good eye when it

comes to choosing a chairman for his collection committee. How much did you hope to get out of me?"

"Waal, Mr. Will, you know us black folk can't do much by ourselves, an' we boun' to call on de white folks to do de most of it."

"I don't know, Joe, the Shady Grove Church must have something like a hundred and fifty members. It would come to only about seven dollars apiece."

"Yassuh, but lots of 'em is women an' chillun. Of co'se some of de women is de bes' payin' members we got. But takin' it all aroun', we ain't got hardly a hunderd payin' members."

"But you must remember, Joe, that that's a Baptist church and I am a Methodist. And you Baptists believe we Methodists are all going to hell anyhow, so what's the use?"

"Naw, suh, Mr. Will, it's dis a-way. Of co'se dey is boun' to be one true religion, an' dey can't be but one, an' of co'se dat's de Babtis'. An' if a man die outside de Babtis' church, it's gwine to go hard wid him. But a man ain't dead till he dies, an' dar ain't no tellin' whut a man will change to befo' dat time."

"So you think I might become a Baptist yet?" Mr. Robertson asked, laughing.

"Yassuh, an' den whutever you is give in time past, is counted to you for righteousness."

"Oh," said Mr. Robertson, "I see. Well, I suppose that line of argument ought to be good for twenty-five dollars, eh?"

"I been a-thinkin' you'd sho' say fifty, Mr. Will."

"You'll have to revise your thoughts, Joe. I think twenty-five is pretty liberal."

"Yassuh, thank you kindly, Mr. Will, but you ain't

got a pair of ole shoes, is you, dat ar pair whut I seen you ridin' in las' week? Dey got a hole in 'em 'bout whar de little toe is on de lef' foot. Malviny needs a pair mighty bad to work 'round de house in. An' I says to myse'f las' week, Mr. Will ain't gwine to wear dem shoes no mo', dey got a hole in 'em."

"But that hole is hardly bigger than a pin head, Joe. I don't see how you ever came to notice it."

"De way I looks at it, Mr. Will, is dat de good Lawd puts eyes in a man's head, and den he say, 'I give you eyes, now use 'em.' "

"All right, tell Malviny to come over to-morrow and get the shoes. Ha! ha! ha; Joe, you are smart. I wish I had your business ability. But they tell me your new 'paschur' is teaching you niggers a lot of nonsense about social equality and about your being pressed down by the white folks and all that sort of thing. What about it?"

"Dey ain't nuthin' to it, Mr. Will. He says we mus' all think it's hon'able to be black, 'cause de Lawd made us black. An' de onliest way for us to make de white folks think it is hon'able, is for us to show 'em. An' de way to show 'em is for us to be good Christians. He says de fust Christians wuz all po' an' lowly, an' ain't nobody ever beat 'em for bein' Christians yit, an' why can't we?"

"That's mighty good doctrine, Joe. All of you stick to that. I'll tell you what I'll do. I will stir around among the white folks for you, and I wouldn't be surprised if I should raise a hundred dollars or more for your church."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Will, but when you does, you'll let me put it down on my list, won't you?"

"Ha! ha! ha! I reckon the old Adam will always be pretty strong in you, Joe."

"Waal, Mr. Will, you know de Good Book say dat a man who won't take keer of hiss'ef is wuss'n an infidell," answered Joe, triumphantly.

"Well, then," replied Mr. Robertson, "you will always be ranked as a staunch defender of the faith, but what does your new pastor say about lynchings and things like that?"

"He says don't do nuthin' to be lynched for, an' den you won't be lynched. He say de way to git ahead of all lynchers is to be good. He say dey may have been a good black man or a good white man lynched some time, somewhar, but he ain't knowed about it puhsonally. But if dey is a bad nigger 'round anywhar, an' de lynchers git started, dey mighty apt to lynch dat bad nigger on gen'l principles whilst dey's about it."

"That new pastor of yours is either mighty good or mighty smart, Joe. I want to have a talk with him some time. But they tell me he's settin' up to Lucindy. How about that?"

"Dey ain't no tellin', Mr. Will, but you knows how young folks is. De Lawd made 'em so dey'll have a hankerin' for one another."

"But do you think a man of his education would honestly mean to marry Lucindy?"

"Lucindy is eddicated herself," answered Joe, proudly, "she kin read an' write an' figger as good as anybody. He ain't gwine to find any gal 'round hyeer dat kin beat Lucindy."

"Well, there's one thing at any rate, Lucindy has got a daddy who is a mighty good trader, and however educated your new pastor may be, he won't be able to outtrade Joe Williams in matrimony or anything else," said Mr. Robertson.

"He'll have to git up mighty soon in de mawnin' to put anything over me, won't he, Mr. Will?"

"Or slip by in the night," answered Mr. Robertson, laughing.

"An' he ain't gwine to do dat neither," said Joe, "but good night, Mr. Will, I better be gittin' to bed, so I kin work good to-morrer."

"Good night, Joe!"

After the chairman of the collection committee had gone, Mr. Robertson sat for a while thinking. "Joe is a smart nigger. He didn't let his foot slip a single time. I must have a talk with Richard Sanders, this new pastor. It may be that at last the niggers have got a good and sensible leader, who will do them some real good. But it's not likely. And I believe there was really a little bit too much simplicity about Joe's talk. Well, we'll see."

While the foregoing conversation was in progress on the porch, Bob and his mother were sitting in the front room reading the July numbers of the two monthly magazines for which the family subscribed. The windows were open, and through them came from time to time to the hearing of the readers detached bits of the talk. Bob heard the new "paschur" mentioned, and without thinking much beforehand, his mind still half on what he was reading, he said, "I heard the other day that Richard Sanders told the niggers all this shouting and groaning in the church was foolishness, and for them to stop it."

"Who told you?" asked his mother.

"Sally," he answered, then he hesitated, "that—that is, I think it was Sally."

"Do you mean John Ramsey's girl?"

"Yes, I think it was her," he answered quite evenly, having recovered his composure.

"How did you happen to be talking to Sally?" asked his mother.

"Oh, I don't know, she was passing along the road when I came to the big gate, and she opened it for me," which was indeed the truth, although Bob was sorry that he had broached the topic.

"But I didn't know she went to his church. I thought she went to the other, where John preaches sometimes."

"That's what I told her," said Bob, "and she said Richard was telling her about it in town last Saturday."

"I must tell Papa about this," said Mrs. Robertson. "He really had hopes of Richard, but if he has got to running around with Sally—you know what a bad reputation Sally has, Bob."

"Yes, I have heard some talk about her," said Bob with what calmness he could muster, but he couldn't keep from blushing.

"And I would rather you shouldn't be seen talking to her," she finished, "there's no telling what sort of stories she might tell."

"Yes, she may never have seen Richard Sanders at all," said Bob. "But don't it make you kinder tired, Mama, for a nigger to go off to all sorts of colleges and come back here to be the spiritual leader of his people? I'll bet you he thinks inside of his woolly head that he's better than any of us."

"I can't keep from feeling that way about it," said Mrs. Robertson, "but Papa says, and it seems right, too, that the only hope for the niggers is for them to be educated and to be better taught morally also."

"Well, it looks to me like we are in trouble either way," said Bob. "If we do educate 'em and make 'em moral and all that, they'll think they are as good as we are. And

if we don't educate 'em and make 'em more moral, then they'll always be lying and stealing and doing all the things they do, and give us trouble that way. What do you think, Mama?"

"Well, that's the race problem, son. And our wisest men haven't solved it yet. Papa says, though, that when in doubt, do what is helpful now and try to get other people to do that, and everything will come out as it should. And that looks like a mighty good platform."

"Yes, Mama, that's so, but after all, this is a white man's country. And just suppose, Mama, that the niggers should get to owning all of the land and have white folks working for 'em. I don't see how we could stand that, do you?"

"No, son, I don't see how we could stand that."

"I'd die first," said Bob, "before I'd work for a nigger."

"So would I, son, and in spite of all Papa tries to do for them, I believe he would, too."

"What's that I would do, too?" asked Mr. Robertson coming in, and looking smilingly at his wife and son.

"Bob and I were just discussing the race question, dear, and we agreed that we'd die before we would work for a nigger, that is, with a nigger over us for our boss. And I said I believe you would, too."

"But I don't think there is any danger of our coming to that," answered Mr. Robertson.

"But you would, wouldn't you, Will?"

"Yes, honey, I would," he said. "But somehow I just happened to think about the Deanes. We haven't had them out here for quite a while, suppose we bring 'em out to spend the day to-morrow?"

"I think that will be fine, don't you, Bob?" answered Mrs. Robertson, looking at her son archly.

"Well," said Bob, "I thought of riding over to the big pasture in the morning."

"I don't see any need to go over to the big pasture. Haven't you been going over there pretty often lately?" said Mr. Robertson.

"It has been nearly a week since I've been there," answered Bob.

"Oh, Bob is just trying to make out like," said his mother, smiling teasingly.

"Well," said Mr. Robertson, "you can drive the car into town and bring 'em out in the morning, Bob."

"All right, Papa, how early do I have to go?"

"Oh, not very early, why?"

"I was thinking I could go over to the pasture first and then drive in for them when I came back."

"No, you are not going to any pasture in the morning," thundered Mr. Robertson.

"But, Will," said Mrs. Robertson, "it seems to me—"

"No," said Mr. Robertson, "we won't argue that point."

Bob flushed very red, sat a moment in silence, then rose saying, "Good night, everybody, I believe I'll go to bed."

After he had gone, Mrs. Robertson said, "Will, you hurt his feelings dreadfully. Why didn't you want him to go to the pasture?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Robertson, "I don't know just exactly why, but I don't want him to go, and he is not going."

He spoke almost angrily, so Mrs. Robertson said, "All right, honey, I'm going to bed, will you come?"

"No, I believe I'll sit up and read a while."

"Well, good night, then!" she kissed him, and went upstairs.

Mr. Robertson sat with a magazine in his hand, but he turned no pages. "There is something wrong about that pasture," he said, "there is certainly something wrong about that pasture."

When he did go upstairs, Mrs. Robertson was still not asleep as she had been worrying about her husband's seemingly irrational anger. He said, "What! not asleep yet, Mamie?"

She answered, "No, I have been thinking. Bob told me that Sally told him she had been talking with Richard Sanders in town last Saturday. And you know, Will, if Richard gets to talking with her what the outcome is likely to be."

"Did Bob tell you that Sally told him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll have to look into that," said Mr. Robertson with anxiety that he could not wholly repress, "but," he added after a moment, "I don't reckon there is anything in it. Ha—ha—hum, I'm sleepy."

But he didn't sleep much that night, his mind was working on the problem of Bob and the big pasture, and this injection of Sally into the field of his thought brought him very near to an unwelcome solution of the puzzle.

CHAPTER XIX

About ten o'clock the next morning Bob returned from Compton, bringing with him in the car Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Deane and Minnie. The three unmarried boys, one older and the other two younger than Minnie, had left early in the morning to hunt up some of their cattle near the head waters of Berry Creek, so none of them came with Bob.

Jasper Deane, the father, was a man of sixty, and Miriam Deane, the mother, a woman of fifty-five. They were well-to-do, owning both land and cattle, and they belonged to the same church as the Robertsons. Mr. Deane was somewhat querulous and irascible, and had adopted a different policy in regard to his tenants from that of Mr. Robertson, which probably accounted, at least in part, for his greater financial solidity. Jasper Deane was known far and wide as a man of strict integrity, but even farther and wider as a man who would have every cent that was legally his. His favorite saying was, "I want what is mine, no more and no less, and I am going to have it." But in deciding what was his, his enemies said, he was quite generous—to himself. And he had a good many enemies, for he had sued many people at law. What he liked to talk about most was how somebody or other tried to cheat him, but how he had brought such nefarious plans to confusion and triumphed over the plotters. He had a passion for running attachments on the property of debtors who he thought were trying to

defraud him. And, indeed, quite generally he made collections where others failed.

His wife Miriam was a shrewd, placid woman and a good housekeeper with a leaning toward thrift, which bent she had acquired since marriage, in consequence of the magnetic current of economy that coursed through the system of her husband.

The Robertsons welcomed them at the front steps. "Well, well," said Mr. Robertson, "I am mighty glad to see all of you, but where are the boys?"

"They had to go to look after some cattle," said Mr. Deane, "up the creek. I think some of them fellers up there have been sticking the wrong kind of brands on some of my calves, and I'll catch the rascals yet, see if I don't."

"You'll catch 'em all right, I'm sure," said Mr. Robertson, "but come right in, all of you. I'm sorry the boys couldn't come with you."

"No, my boys are hard workers, every one of them," said Mr. Deane, casting a glance out of the corner of his eye at Bob, as they entered the house.

Mrs. Robertson conducted Mrs. Deane and Minnie upstairs to her room to dispose of their hats, powder their noses, engage in a few minutes of feminine chatter about children, husbands, recent deaths, prospective marriages, and the present triflingness of nigger servants in comparison with what they used to be. And there was to be doubtless an interchange of amenities in regard to styles, dresses, and the high cost of living interspersed with a disquisition by Mrs. Robertson on the merits of Bob.

Downstairs in the sitting-room the men talked about the weather, the crops, the Ku Klux Klan, and the

triflingness of niggers, interspersed with a disquisition by Mr. Deane on extravagance in general, the high cost of living, and the prevailing indisposition on the part of debtors to pay their debts.

When the ladies came down, Mrs. Robertson said, "Bob, I wonder if you and Minnie wouldn't like to gather a few peaches from those trees nearest the house. I have a sunbonnet here for Minnie."

"I think it would be awfully jolly," Minnie answered, seeing through the transparent stratagem at once.

"Certainly," said Bob without enthusiasm, "come on, Minnie."

When they reached the orchard, Minnie said, "It looked like you didn't want to come out here with me, Bob."

"Oh, no," said Bob, "it's all right. I'm glad to come. Let's see, I believe that tree over there has the best peaches on it."

"Somehow it seems to me that you are sulky about something," insisted Minnie.

"No, I never was in a better humor in my life. If you will hold the basket a minute, I will get the peaches."

"If you don't want me out here, I will go back to the house this minute," she exclaimed, "there for the old basket!" She threw the basket on the ground, stamped her foot, then put her hands to her face, and turned to go.

Bob hastened to catch her hands and pull them from her face. "No, Minnie, I—I—you know—I oughtn't—I oughtn't," he stammered.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Bob Robertson?"

"Well—well, I can't tell you, but—"

"Oh, so you've got a great big dark secret, have you? How funny!" She spoke with sarcasm.

"Well, yes, I have," answered Bob somewhat defiantly, but blushingly.

"Oh, and what is it, you oughtn't to do?"

"I oughtn't to—to think about you, much less—"

"Oh, dear me, you needn't think about me. If that hurts your conscience, you may save yourself the worry!"

"Now, Minnie, don't get mad at me, but yes, maybe you'd better."

"Well, I must say you're the funniest thing this morning; I'm going straight to the house," Minnie declared, but she made no move.

"No, no, please don't," begged Bob. "Stay here till I gather the peaches. I—I won't touch you, I oughtn't—"

"What's all this talk about touching me and oughtn't?" asked Minnie. "I don't understand it. I'm sure I don't want you to touch me, now or ever!" There were tears in her voice.

"Just please wait till I can gather the peaches," said Bob. "It won't do for us to go in without them. And please don't ever say anything about—about me to—to anybody."

"All right." answered Minnie, "I will sit down on the grass under this tree, and you go over to that far one, so there won't be the least danger of your touching me. It might be better, too, for you to shut your eyes so you won't even see me. Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, "I might be dangerous even to look at."

"No, no, it's not that," began Bob, earnestly, "but I —I—"

"Go on and gather the old peaches," said Minnie, petulantly.

When they returned to the house, Bob stopped by the kitchen to give the peaches to Cindy to peel. Minnie went on into the sitting-room.

"Why, where is Bob?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"He stopped by to give the peaches to Cindy," answered Minnie, "but Miss Mamie, may I go up to your room to wash my face? It was so hot in the orchard and the peach furs on my hands sting so."

"Certainly, honey, you will find water and towels and everything up there, but I'll run along with you."

"Oh, no, no, no, don't," said Minnie with more vehemence than she had intended to betray.

"All right, honey," said Mrs. Robertson, perceiving that Minnie wished to be alone, and wondering why she and Bob had quarreled. But she thought of it very tolerantly as some lovers' quarrel that would end soon in greater devotion. It was a fixed idea in her mind that Bob and Minnie were destined for each other and deeply in love. She was thinking, "The poor dear young foolish things! They must have their tiffs."

Minnie threw herself face down on the bed in Mrs. Robertson's room, and burst into tears, waving her heels violently and exclaiming over and over again, "I hate him! I hate him! He's in love with some other girl, and he don't know how to tell me about it. I hate him! I hate him! But maybe he has done something wrong, very wrong, and it's his conscience. No, no, that couldn't be, he is such a good boy! All the boys laugh at him for being such a good boy. He's in love with another girl. Oh, how I hate him, hate him, hate him!"

After some minutes Mrs. Deane came into the room quietly, and gently inquired, "What's the matter, Minnie darling?"

Minnie pretended to awake from a deep sleep.

"Why, honey, asleep this time of the morning! What can be the matter? Aren't you well?" But she saw the traces of tears on her daughter's face, and understood that the surmise Mrs. Robertson had confided to her was correct.

"I suppose it must have been the heat in the orchard," said Minnie, but her lips quivered.

"No, no, honey, don't cry. It will all come right."

"But, Mama, Mama, he loves somebody else, and what am I going to do?"

"No, no, honey, he couldn't love anybody else. Who could he love?"

"Well, then, he must have done something awful."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, he said he ought not to touch me, ought not even to think about me, and—and it looked like he didn't know what to say."

"Did he say that?" asked Mrs. Deane, stirred out of her usual placidity. "Did he say that?"

"Yes, yes, Mama, that's what he said."

"And Mamie holds him up as a pattern to the universe," said Mrs. Deane, speaking to herself rather than to her daughter. Then, "I must tell you, honey, I must tell you soon what young men here usually mean when they say that, but not now, not now. Oh, and he, too! I had hoped, but never mind, honey, we can forget about him."

"No, no, no, Mama, I don't want to forget about him," exclaimed Minnie with the petulance of an only daughter. "I know he hasn't done anything. You mustn't think that about him."

"Think what, honey?"

"What you are thinking."

"What am I thinking?"

"Oh, Mama, I know, I know what you are thinking. I know lots of things, lots of things. You see, Mama, I go to school, and I have heard women talk, white women and black. And I know, I know. How could any woman here not know? But it is not true of Bob, and—and if it were—"

"Yes, honey, if it were?"

"Oh, I—I don't know, Mama, but I don't want to give him up. Who is there that's better? And he is so smart and good looking and—and nice!"

"Yes, honey, well, don't bother now. Dry your eyes. You wouldn't want them to know you had been crying. Dry your eyes, wash your face, and put some powder on it. You will need to be brave, honey. Oh, you will need to be brave!" And Mrs. Deane began to cry herself.

"What's the matter, Mama?"

"Oh, nothing much, honey. It's an old, old matter, and I'm an old, old woman. But come, we will wash our faces together, and then we'll be friends forever," and she smiled through her tears.

Mother and daughter came down the stairs smiling as if this were a pleasant world inhabited by only happy women and good men. Mr. Deane was saying, "If the Ku Klux would just take up the matter of making folks pay their debts, I would be in favor of their work. Wouldn't it be fine, Will, if they'd catch some of these dead-beats around here and treat 'em to a coat of tar and feathers? Hey, wouldn't that be fine?"

"But you see, Mr. Deane, that's one trouble with 'em," answered Mr. Robertson, "every man wants 'em to pun-

ish the things he don't like. I have no doubt that some people here would be glad for 'em to tar and feather all the creditors of the community."

"Well," said Mr. Deane, somewhat incensed, "only the lawless element, the dead-beats and the ne'er-do-wells would want that, and they ought to be put down."

"But have you ever thought of what element in this neck of the woods would mainly compose the Ku Klux Klan?"

"Well, I read that they are going in for Americanism pure and simple, for white supremacy, for the enforcement of laws, and for race purity. It would seem to me to be a pretty good element that would go in for them things."

"And their method of procedure is by midnight masked mobs inflicting cruel and unusual punishments without due process of law—and you are a stickler for the Constitution, Mr. Deane."

"Well, of course, I don't approve of 'em," said Mr. Deane, "but I was just saying that if we have to have 'em, they might as well tend to the dead-beats along with the other riff-raff while they are about it. Hey, what do you think?"

But dinner was announced. At the table Mrs. Robertson was careful to seat Bob and Minnie on the same side, so placing Mr. Deane and Minnie on either side of Mr. Robertson at the head of the table, and Mrs. Deane and Bob on either side of herself at the foot. Her idea was that during the meal Mr. Robertson and Mr. Deane would talk together mainly, Bob and Minnie, and she and Mrs. Deane. But it turned out differently, for the arrangement put Bob vis-à-vis with Mrs. Deane.

After Mr. Robertson had said grace, emphasized by

a hearty "Amen!" from Mr. Deane, Mrs. Deane began an exploratory operation on Bob, while Minnie feigned an interest in the talk of her father and Mr. Robertson on the length of cotton staple and various methods of combating boll-weevils.

"My! Bob, how smart they all say you are!" began Mrs. Deane, "and I have never seen your medal."

"Show it to her, Bob," said his mother, bridling with pleasure.

"Oh, Mama!" protested Bob.

"Yes, indeed, I would like to see it," exclaimed Mrs. Deane.

Bob took the medal out of his pocket and handed it across the table.

"My, how beautiful! Why don't you wear it on a chain or something, so that everybody can see it?"

"I don't know, 'm," said Bob, "it sorter makes a feller feel foolish to go around with a shining medal hung on him."

"Jasper," she said to her husband, "look at this. It is Bob's scholarship medal. Ain't it fine?"

Mr. Deane took it in his hand. "Yes," he answered, "it's gold. It must have cost at least ten dollars. I wonder how the school board could legally make an appropriation for that."

"It was bought and paid for by the principal out of his own pocket," said Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, well, it may be plated then and probably didn't cost more than five."

Bob blushed and Mrs. Robertson was indignant, but Mrs. Deane said, "It was so smart of him, though, to get it!"

"Well, yes, I reckon so, but a smart boy ought to be

able to make five dollars on buying and selling one yearling," answered Mr. Deane, giving the medal back to his wife, and resuming his talk with Mr. Robertson.

She restored it to Bob, saying, "Don't mind him, Bob, he just thinks that the conceit should be taken out of all young people, and he is teasing you."

"Yessum, I know Mr. Deane, I don't mind him," said Bob, but hate welled up in his heart.

"And does a boy who studies so much have time to interest himself in the farming?" she asked.

"Well, he has some cattle of his own in the big pasture," answered Mrs. Robertson, "and he has always looked after them carefully, especially of late."

"And the big pasture is along the creek on the other side of the railroad track, ain't it?"

"Yessum," answered Bob, wondering why she asked, and with alarm in his eyes.

"We went over there dew-berry hunting one time," she said, "and who was it working in the field over on that side? I remember we got thirsty and some of them brought us a bucket of water. I believe it was one of John Ramsey's girls, but I am not sure."

"Most likely it was," said Mrs. Robertson, "his field is over there."

"He is pretty trifling, ain't he?"

"He is the triflingest one of our tenants," answered Mrs. Robertson.

"But sometimes a trifling nigger can make his children work well, though I seem to recollect that his children are all girls, so I suppose they don't do much."

"He has some boys," said Bob, anxious to divert the conversation, if only a little way.

"But the boys are too small to do much," said Mrs.

Robertson, "and I am afraid the girls are not very good workers, either. I have been trying to get Will to turn John off with his whole crew, but he sorter hates to do it."

"Yes, Mr. Robertson is mighty soft-hearted," said Mrs. Deane, "but my motto is that the bad man always finds work for idle hands to do and that it is better to get rid of them before evil communications corrupt good manners."

"Oh, I don't suppose they do any real harm to anybody else on the place," said Mrs. Robertson. "The only thing is that John is always coming out behind, so we lose money on him nearly every year."

"Well, there ain't any telling," answered Mrs. Deane, and she shot a glance at Bob that he couldn't meet. He blushed, dropped his eyes to his plate, and pretended to be very busy eating.

But Mrs. Deane went on, "Do you tend to your cattle all by yourself, Bob? My boys say it is a hard job for one man, so they always go together."

"Oh, it's not so much to rope a steer and throw him," said Bob. "I don't need any help."

"Yes, Bob is right skilful that way," said Mrs. Robertson with pride.

"But it seems to me you would get lonesome over there in the pasture by yourself," said Mrs. Deane.

"No'm, I don't ever think about that," answered Bob.

"If you should, I suppose you could get some of John's folks to help you, they are so convenient there."

Bob was thoroughly frightened. It seemed to him that the questions were very persistent and pointed, and Mrs. Robertson began to think, "I wonder what she is driving at?"

Bob merely repeated, "No'm, I don't need any help."

"Oh, I was just thinking that idle niggers wander around so, that probably some of them would be over in the pasture most of the time," said Mrs. Deane, and that bolt penetrated even Mrs. Robertson's complacence.

"John's folks wander towards town, I think, not towards the pasture," she said.

"Yessum, you can see some of them going to town nearly every day," said Bob eagerly, too eagerly to escape the wisdom of eyes that had had fifty-five years of experience.

"That's it, that's where the trouble lies, that's what is hurting his conscience," reflected Mrs. Deane to herself, but aloud she said, "Mr. Will, don't you think it is a perfect shame the prices the merchants are charging these days?" But she quickly returned her glance to Bob, to watch his face for an expected expression of relief, and her expectation was gratified.

"Yes, I don't see that the high cost of living has come down very much except in the price of what we farmers produce," said Mr. Robertson.

This was one of Mr. Deane's favorite topics, so he interposed, "Yes, look at shoes. During the War the merchants said the price of hides was so high and that was the reason they had to charge so much for shoes. Now you can't get anything at all for hides, and they say the amount of leather that goes into a pair of shoes don't make much difference anyway, that it's labor and overhead expense and anything and everything. I wish the Ku Klux would get some of these infernal profiteers, that's what I wish," and he brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

The talk became general among the older people, and

remained so. Minnie cast a furtive glance or two at Bob, but found no response. Once, as if by accident, she touched his hand, but he quickly drew it away. It seemed to him that the dinner would never come to an end, and he wished the earth would open up and swallow Mrs. Deane then and there, or, at least, before she could get a chance to talk privately to Minnie or his mother. The very thought of her talking to his mother filled him with horror, which was mixed with wonder as to how she had happened to hit on the pasture and John Ramsey's family as subjects to examine him about. And what did she know, and how did she find it out? It all seemed very mysterious to him. He did not know that his confidences to Minnie had been related to her mother, and that those confidences coupled with the general reputation of John Ramsey's girls and the geography of the farm had been enough very naturally and simply to point out the road for Mrs. Deane's suspicion.

As they rose from the table, Mr. Deane was saying, "No, Will, your theory is wrong. A nigger ought always be made to pay every cent he owes you, even if you have to take his team and tools and then sell 'em back to him. It's a lesson in morals to 'em. If they all knew they always had to pay all they owed, then they wouldn't be so reckless about running into debt. You forgive 'em something at the end of one year, and then they want you to forgive 'em more at the end of the next. I make mine pay me if it takes the last thing they've got. They don't beat me out of much."

"No, nobody can beat you out of much, Mr. Deane," answered Mr. Robertson, who was tired of the discussion.

"That they can't, and I am proud of it," said Mr. Deane.

"But some day before long some nice looking young feller will be beating you out of Minnie," said Mrs. Robertson, smiling, as they took their seats in the sitting-room.

"Well, it won't be any young feller that's not a good worker. I can tell you that," said Mr. Deane.

"To hear him talk, you'd think Papa worked all of the time," said Minnie.

"No, but when I was young, I worked from daylight to dark every day, and many a day long after dark. And I believe in young men working and saving," he replied with emphasis, "I worked and saved."

"And what's even more important still," said Mrs. Deane, "is that a young man must be upright and good and pure."

"Well, working and saving will come mighty near to making him all of that," answered her husband.

The Deanes didn't stay very long after dinner. About three o'clock Mrs. Deane said they had to go, so Bob drove back with them in the car to Compton.

After they had left, Mr. Robertson said, "Mamie, somehow or other it don't seem to me that Mrs. Deane was pleased with her visit."

"No, and she seemed to have some sort of spite against Bob. It looked as if she thought he wasn't good enough for Minnie. I never heard such an examination as she fired at him at the dinner table."

"What about?"

"Oh, about his work and his cattle and the pasture and who helped him. And she kept on talking about John Ramsey and his girls, as if Bob had any interest in them."

"Oh, she did, did she?" said Mr. Robertson, thoughtfully. And then hastening to hide his concern, he added, "And Mr. Deane was throwing out hints about young men working, too—as if Bob were some idle loafer!"

"I don't like it, my boy is good enough for anybody in the world! If her boys were one thousandth part as good!" exclaimed Mrs. Robertson, bursting into tears.

Mr. Robertson soothed her with reassuring words and affectionate caresses, but he kept asking himself, "What have they got against Bob?" And the suspicion that had so greatly troubled him the night before flared up again.

Bob on his way to Compton with the Deanes was taciturn, hardly saying a word during the short drive. On his way back his reflections took a definite shape, "I wish I had never got mixed up in this thing. It has given me a lot of trouble already and it is likely to give me still more. And it may give Mama a lot of trouble, and Papa too. And what am I going to do about Minnie? And that old cat of a Mrs. Deane, she knows something. Well, I've got to stay away from that pasture. That's all there is to that. No, I've got to stay away! Oh, I wish I hadn't been such a fool! At Sunday school I have to be such a hypocrite! Oh, and next Sunday is Sacrament day at the church. I wonder how I am going to get out of taking the Sacrament. Oh, I don't know what to do!"

But something opposed began to whisper to him, and the whisper aroused in him again a curious sense of joy, a feeling as it were of exultation in his masculinity.

CHAPTER XX

THURSDAY morning at breakfast Mr. Robertson said, "Bob, I am going to the lower place this morning. They started the hay-making down there Monday, and I want to see how they are getting on. Do you want to go with me or over to the big pasture?"

"I don't think there is any special need of going to the pasture," said Bob, steadily, "and I would like to go with you."

Mr. Robertson was pleased and said cheerily, "All right, tell Cyrus to saddle up the horses. And, Mamie, let Cyrus go to town for the mail. I am expecting an important letter from Green & Porter."

"Are you still thinking about accepting the position they offer you, Will?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, not very definitely. I merely wrote them for further particulars."

"Why wouldn't it be a good idea, Papa, to put up a rural free delivery box by the big gate? It would save a lot of going to town for the mail," said Bob.

"I don't like to have to wait for the carrier," answered his father, "and then he might lose some of the letters. I have to go to town nearly every day, anyhow. But really I suppose it would be more sensible to have a box out there. John Ramsey has one," and he smiled quizzically.

"Well, I didn't mean for you to copy after John Ramsey," said Bob, blushing, "but I was just thinking—"

"All the niggers and poor white trash in the country

have boxes, and indeed nearly everybody else, and you are right, son, but I suppose the real reason is that I have just grown up going to the post-office and keep on doing it."

Sim Senter's house was near the southeast corner of the lower place, Madison Mulberry's was near the southwest corner and not far from the creek bottom. Through the middle of the place and about equally distant from each of the two houses ran a farm road to the hay-field at the north end of the place. At one spot by the side of this road was a dense thicket of plum trees, and just across the road from that was a patch of fifteen or twenty acres of second-growth pine timber with a thick undergrowth of brambles, wild grape vines and black jack saplings, which had been allowed to grow undisturbed because the ground there was so cut up with large gullies as to be untillable.

Mr. Robertson and Bob entered upon the place at the gate near Madison Mulberry's house, went through Madison's crop, and turned into the road at a point near the thicket. As they were passing between the thicket and the patch of timber, Saladin shied so suddenly as to come near unseating Bob, "My!" he said, "this is a dense place in here. I wonder what Saladin thinks he saw."

"Probably a 'possum or a rabbit," answered Mr. Robertson, "or some sort of varmint moving about. I think I'll have this brush cleared away next winter. I don't know as it does any harm, but it don't look good."

"Well, anyhow, it makes a sort of cool spot now," said Bob.

Soon they came to the hay field where they found the gang just beginning the day's work.

"Well, Sim, you seem to have gotten most of the men on the place," said Mr. Robertson.

"Yaas," answered Sim Senter, "my two boys, Sam Stallins' four, Jim Birdsall, Hez Monroe, and Tom Talley, nine in all. That's as many as I need to run two mowers and the press and do the rakin'. Of course I didn't say nuthin' to Madison Mulberry or his boy Lys about comin'."

"No, that would hardly have done," said Mr. Robertson.

"We're gittin' a sorter late start, but the dew was so heavy this mawnin'."

"Well, it is better to wait and not cut the grass while it's wet."

"Yaas, that's what I thought, but, Mr. Will, I want you to run that Lys off the place. He ain't done a thing except lay around ever since he's been back. And he's been runnin' me down to the niggers and stirrin' 'em up about the low wages paid on the farm, and jes' playin' the big Ike gen'r'lly."

"Has he been giving you any special trouble?"

"Well, not to say exactly, but Susie has been bringin' our dinner to me and the boys in the buggy, to save time, an' yestiddy she says she seen Lys in the brush down there by the plum thicket, an' he wuz a-watchin' her. Whut wuz he doing there? I don't think he wuz up to any good. Harry wanted to go right over and jump on him but I said, no, we'd better not have any rucus."

"That's right," answered Mr. Robertson, "I'll tell Madison to make him light out."

"Maybe you'd better see him yourself, Mr. Will."

"All right, I will if I can find him."

In the meantime Bob had ridden to where the Senter boys were, Harry on a mowing machine and Jim on a hay rake. "Hello, Jim! Hello, Harry!" he said.

"Hello, Bob," they answered.

"You've got plumb well, haven't you, Jim?"

"Jest about," Jim answered.

"How you comin', Harry?"

"Fine and dandy."

"Well, what's up?"

"Nuthin' much," answered Harry, "cept I'm layin' off to beat hell out of that Lys Mulberry as soon as I kin git time. Me an' Jim's goin' to ketch him some day and strop him till he can't set down. Don't you want to git in on it?"

Bob recognized this as a mark of great friendship on Harry's part, so he asked, "When do you expect to get to it?"

"If you wuz to happen over hyeer 'bout next Sunday evenin' you wouldn't be fur wrong," answered Harry.

"All right, I'll be here, if I can get off," answered Bob, "and I reckon I can."

"Good boy!" said Harry, "come right after dinner. But I've got to cut this grass. Gee! come up there!" And the rattle of the mowing-machine began to shrill above the sound of bird and insect, and drowned the murmur of human voices in the field. Bob sat on Saladin and watched the grass fall in an even swath as the machine moved along. He was in now for helping to beat Ulysses Mulberry and consequently for very probable trouble with the folks at home, but he felt that Ulysses certainly deserved a beating, and he was elated over

Harry's attitude of respect. He felt that he had proved himself, that he was now accounted worthy of a share in an enterprise that required both strength and valor, and his heart swelled with pride.

His reflections were interrupted by Jim's saying, "We'll give him sich a beatin' that he won't want to stay 'round hyeer no mo'."

"You bet, we'll tan his hide good and proper," answered Bob.

With a grin of anticipatory delight Jim whipped up the mule hitched to the hay-rake and began his labor of the day.

Mr. Robertson came riding down the field and joined Bob. "We've got to go over to Madison Mulberry's," he said.

"What for, Papa?" asked Bob.

"Well, I'm afraid Lys will cause some trouble, and I'm going to make Madison run him off the place."

"Oh, we're—" Bob began without thinking, then he recovered himself and said, "He ought to have a good beating before he is run off."

"No," said Mr. Robertson, "the only thing necessary is to get rid of him. But what were you going to say?"

"Nothing much, I wasn't thinking,—oh, we are not going to spend the day over here, then?"

"No, I'd like to get back home before dinner and see the mail. I may want to answer a letter this evening."

"How would it do for me to stay?" asked Bob. "I could eat dinner with the Senters."

"So you and Harry have arrived at an understanding," said Mr. Robertson, laughing, "the former foes have buried the hatchet and maybe concluded an offensive and defensive alliance."

"Something like that, I reckon," said Bob shamefacedly.

"That'll be all right," said Mr. Robertson, "and you'd better run the mowing machine for him a while this evening. I want you to see what it's like."

"All right," answered Bob, "I'll be glad to."

"Well, come on now, and we'll see Madison, and then you can come back."

They found Madison working in his field. "Good morning, Madison," said Mr. Robertson, "where is Ulysses."

"He said he wuz goin' to town," answered Madison, shortly.

"I didn't ask you where he said he was going. I want to know where he is."

"I reckon he's in town, Mr. Will."

"Don't you know where he is?"

"Naw, suh, I ain't seed him sence soon dis mawnin'."

"I told you to make him help you work or to drive him off the place."

"He's been a-he'pin' me."

"You're a liar, he hasn't."

"Whut's dat Sim Senter been a-tellin' you, Mr. Will?"

"Never mind what he's been telling me. I want to see Lys. He has got to get off this place."

"He say he's gwine Sad'day."

"Where's he going to?"

"He's gwine back to de City. He say he can't fool 'long wid no farmin'. Dey ain't enough money in it."

"Well, I'll hold you responsible for him and his conduct till Saturday then. And if he doesn't leave here bright and early Saturday morning, back into jail you go."

"He say he's gwine to leave Sad'day," Madison repeated sullenly.

"Well, see that he does," answered Mr. Robertson, but as he and Bob rode away, he felt that he had again clashed with a will stronger than his own. And Bob, too, was conscious of an uneasy feeling of dissatisfaction. They rode together a hundred yards or so. Then Mr. Robertson turned his horse toward home, and Bob headed for the hayfield.

"So long, Bob, get home before dark."

"All right, Papa." And each went his way.

At noon Susie Senter brought dinner to the field. She came in a decrepit buggy drawn by a patient old gray mule. The dinner, over which a white cloth had been spread, was on a large waiter, which she carried on her lap, to lessen the jolting. She had to drive holding her arms up and elbows akimbo. Bob laughed at her comical appearance, as she drove up under the shade of the oak tree where Sim and his boys and Bob were waiting The Negro hands in a group were eating their lunches a little further down the field. "Hello, Susie," Bob said, "you look like you're gettin' ready to fly."

"Lawd, Bob," she answered, "I didn't know you wuz out hyeer. I'm a perfect sight with this old dress on. It ain't nuthin' but rags, and it's a mile too short."

"I wasn't thinking about that," said Bob, "I was lookin' at your elbows."

"Well, how's anybody goin' to drive with they lap full of dinner if they don't hold up they elbows? And this ole mule is so slow and I can't whup him without spillin' the dinner, so I have to come at a creep."

"Well, Susie, have you et?" asked Sim, lifting a keg of fresh water out of the back of the buggy.

"Yes, I had a snack with Ma and the chillun," said Susie. She reached into the pocket of her dress, pulled

out a snuff-box and a brush made by chewing the end of a black-gum twig, dipped the brush into the snuff, and stuck it into her mouth with an air of complacency.

Sim looked at her and then at Bob, and said, "She's mighty young, I think, to begin dippin', but then she's past fifteen, and she's gittin' to think she's mighty nigh grown."

"Yes," said Bob, embarrassed, "I expect she'll be getting beaux in her head pretty soon."

"She's got 'em there now," said Jim.

"You bet she has," chuckled Harry.

"Oh, shet up," answered Susie with a toss of her head.

"Did you see anybody when you wuz comin' 'long the road?" asked Sim.

"Nary a soul," said Susie. "I wuz keepin' a look-out, but I didn't see nobody."

"Who did you expect to see?" asked Bob.

"Well, them Mulberry niggers have been hangin' around," answered Sim.

"Oh, Papa told Madison that he had to run Lys off the place," said Bob. "And Madison said Lys was goin' to leave Saturday morning."

Harry winked at Bob, "Well, he'd better get away. That's all I got to say."

"Hunh! You're rhymin' this mawnin'," said Susie with a titter.

"Well, rhymin' ain't all I'm goin' to be doin' mighty soon," said Harry.

"Now look'ee hyeer, Harry," said Sim, "keep yo' hands off of that nigger till after Sad'day anyway."

"All right, I'll give him till Sad'day," said Harry, "but

after that he'd better look out for a surprise party, eh, Bob?"

"Now, don't you go to draggin' Bob into nuthin'," said Sim.

"Oh, he ain't draggin' me," said Bob. "Don't worry about me."

"Well, I wouldn't never git over it," said Sim, "if he wuz to git you into trouble."

"Mrs. Senter is sho' a prime hand at frying chicken," said Bob.

"Yaas, this does taste pretty good, don't it?" answered Sim.

"You bet it does, and this corn-bread is hard to beat."

"Gim'me flour bread for mine," said Jim, "cawn-bread scratches my th'oat."

"Waal, if we've got enough," said Sim, when the others had stopped eating, "Susie kin take the things back, and then we'll rest up a little while, and afterward we'll introduce Bob to Mister Mowin' Machine."

"Oh, is Bob goin' to mow some?" asked Susie. "Lem'-me stay and see him start off, Papa."

"All right, if Bob don't keer," answered Sim.

"I don't care," said Bob, "but I reckon you'll get the laugh back on me, Susie, when I first start off."

"Shucks!" said Harry. "Anybody kin run a mowin'-machine."

"But I bet Bob gits tangled up at fust," said Jim.

"Anyway I'd like to see him make a start-off," said Susie.

After half an hour of rest, Sim, followed by the three boys, and leaving Susie in the buggy, took the keg of water and carried it to where the Negroes were sprawl-

ing in the shade of a hackberry. "Come on," he said to them, "git a drink of fresh water, and less hit the grit."

They gathered around, laughing and joking each other. Bill, a man of fifty and Uncle Sam's oldest son, put the keg of water to his lips and drank thirstily. "Lawd," said Jim Birdsall, "dat nigger's legs is holler."

"Dey sho' is," said Tom Talley, "if you wuz to stick a pin in his big toe, a stream of water would come spoutin' out."

"Dey sho' would, haw, haw, haw!" guffawed Hez Monroe, and the others joined in the laughter delightedly, as at a display of great wit.

"Nemmine," said Bill, setting the keg down at last, "holler legs is better'n a holler head any time."

"But de wust of all is a holler belly," said Hez.

"Now, nigger, you sho' is a-talkin'!" exclaimed Tom Talley, at which there was general and vociferous laughter.

"When mine gits holler, it sho' do holler out loud to me," said Bill.

"Whut do it say, Bill?" asked Jim Birdsall.

"It say, nigger, whar is dat hog-meat, whar is dem collards? It say nunck-unh, nigger, dis ain't gwine to do. You got to git up an' hustle!"

"Well," said Sim, "that's what we'll do now, Bill, you better git up on the press this evenin', and Jim and Hez kin tie, an' Jodie kin run the bull-rake, and little Sammy kin git off the mowin' machine for an hour or so an' stack up them bales. Bob wants to try his hand at mowin'."

"Watch out, grass, if Mr. Bob's gwine to tackle you!" exclaimed Jim Birdsall.

"An' hyeer's one nigger's glad he is gwine to be on top of de press," said Bill. "When Mr. Bob comes along slatter-ratter-klatter, I wants my toes out of de way."

"Oh, shut up," said Bob, "I bet I'll cut the grass all right."

"Well, boys, git to it," said Sim, and they all went to their places.

Bob passed the test very successfully. Susie returned to the house with the dishes. The hum and clatter of the hay-making filled the summer afternoon, the jest and laughter of the workers around the press now and again rising for a moment above the rattle of the machines, soon to be submerged again under their metallic clatter.

Once little Sammy, Uncle Sam's youngest, remarked pensively, "Dem mowin' machines sho' do put me in mind of dem German machine-guns, ratty-rat-rat, and whar is you, nigger, if you come out of dat hole we'll find you."

"Naw," said Jodie, his brother, "dem machine-guns didn't say dat, dey wuz a sayin' put-put-put, put yo' foot in yo' han' an' git out of dis country."

"Well, you put-put-put, put the hay in that press and keep her a-goin'," said Sim.

"Ki-yi," said Jim Birdsall, who hadn't been to the War, "dar you is! Hit de ball an keep 'er a-rollin'. We ain't got no time to talk about Germans." And he broke into a sort of chant, "We ain't got no time, we ain't got no time. Oh, hit de ball, an' keep 'er a-rollin', keep 'er a-rollin'."

About four o'clock Bob drove his mowing machine up to the press, and said, "Well, I expect I'd better be goin' now."

"All right," said Sim, "crawl up there, little Sammy, and make 'er hum."

Bob mounted Saladin and started on his way home, thinking, "I don't know when I have had a better time. Farming is not so bad after all. But I wonder where Lys Mulberry is. Wonder if we're goin' to get to lick him."

But he saw nothing of either Lys or Madison as he passed near their house to reach the gate. He rode on along the edge of the bottom until he came to the gate in the fence of the home place. This gate was near Joe Williams's house, and not far away Ella and Mariah, two of Joe's daughters, were hoeing in a sweet potato patch. Ella dropped her hoe and ran to open the gate for him. Mariah stopped work, leaned on her hoe handle, and watched Ella's progress, "Hunh!" she said to herself, "Ella'd break her neck any time for Mr. Bob. How come he couldn't open dat gate for hisse'f? He ain't paralyzed."

"Hello, Ella," said Bob, "you needn't have bothered. I could open the gate all right."

"Oh, I likes to open a gate for you, Mr. Bob," she answered.

She looked at him with such admiration that Bob was embarrassed. "Well," he replied, "I'm sorry I haven't got any change in my pocket."

"Oh, you know good and well, Mr. Bob, I don't want nuthin' for openin' a gate. But if you got dat medal wid you, I'd sho' like to see dat agin."

"All right," said Bob, pulling it out of his pocket, "here it is."

"Dat sho' is a pretty medal," exclaimed Ella. "An' jes' think, if dey had ha' had one at de cullud school dis year I'd 've got it. And if dey have one next year, I bet I'll git it."

"Is that so?" replied Bob. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll try to get Papa to offer a medal for the best scholar in the colored school next year."

"He'll do it," said Ella, "if you speak to him about it. I'm sho' he'll do it."

"I expect he will," said Bob. "I think I heard him say something about offering some kind of prize, but it seems to me it was a pig or a calf."

"Tell him to be sho' an' make it a medal," said Ella. "But, Mr. Bob, is you goin' to take a nap by de spring dis evenin'?"

"Did you come that other time while I was asleep?" asked Bob.

"Unh-hunh!" answered Ella, "I tiptoed by and didn't wake you up, though. But you don't never come round de spring much, now, do you, Mr. Bob?"

"No, I haven't got any business at the spring."

"But it's a mighty nice, cool place in dis hot weather," said Ella.

"Yes, so it is," answered Bob.

"Ella! Ella!" came Malviny's voice from the house, "Come hyeer dis minute. I want you to go atter some water."

Ella handed the medal back and hurried to the house.

CHAPTER XXI

At ten o'clock Friday night Mr. Robertson was in the sitting-room reading *David Copperfield*. Mrs. Robertson was gone to bed. Although she and her husband read many books aloud together, she didn't like Dickens, and moreover was tired from a hot day's work of preserving peaches for the winter. Mr. Robertson and Bob had spent the afternoon in the big pasture together, doctoring their prize bull. The screw worms had got him this time, and he was hard to handle, so Bob, worn out, had also retired early. Mr. Robertson had seen nothing suspicious in the big pasture, so his mind was at rest as he read for the fourth or fifth time his favorite book.

"Mr. Will! Mr. Will!" came a raucous whisper from the front porch.

He looked up from the book, and saw against the wire screen of the raised window glistening teeth and shining eyes.

"Who is that?" he asked not loudly.

"It's me. It's Cyrus, Mr. Will," came in a voice low, but wildly excited.

"What's the matter, Cyrus?"

"Fo' Gaad's sake, come out hyeer, Mr. Will. Come quick."

There was such fright in the tone that Mr. Robertson jumped from his seat and rushed swiftly to the porch.

"Sh! Mr. Will, don't make no fuss," said Cyrus. "Come on, come quick." And Cyrus led the way stealthily down the steps and around the house toward the rear.

Mr. Robertson followed him in alarmed and silent amazement for many paces, but then he asked, "Cyrus, what on earth is the matter?"

"Come on, Mr. Will, he's out hyeer. He's in de horse-lot, an' he's like a wild man, Mr. Will. He's like a wild man!"

"Who? In the name of God, who, Cyrus?"

"He say he got to see you, he got to see you right now."

"But who is it?"

"Hush, Mr. Will, not so loud. Don't make no noise, Mr. Will."

"But who is it?" Mr. Robertson asked again.

"Hush, Mr. Will, it's Madison."

"Why didn't you tell me so I could get my gun?"

"Oh, Mr. Will, you don't need no gun. Dey is atter him now. Oh, he say can't nobody but you save him, Mr. Will. I tell you he's like a wild man."

"Who's after him?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"All of 'em, all of 'em, Mr. Will, all of 'em dat ain't after Lys."

"What are they after him for?"

"Ax him, Mr. Will, he'll tell you. I don't know nuthin' about it, Mr. Will. I don't know nuthin' about it. I ain't got nuthin' to do wid it."

They came to the horse-lot. There emerged from the shadow of the barn an indistinct figure. It came swiftly toward them, threw itself on the ground at Mr. Robertson's feet, caught hold of them with its hands, and Madison's voice shaken by the extremest terror implored, "Oh, Mr. Will, oh, Mr. Will, don't let 'em ketch me, don't let 'em hang me, don't let 'em burn me! Oh, Mr. Will, do somep'n wid me. Quick, quick, Mr. Will!"

"What's wrong, Madison?"

"Oh, dey's atter me, dey's atter me, Mr. Will."

"What have you done? In the name of God what have you done?"

"I ain't done nuthin', Mr. Will. I ain't done nuthin'. I swar to Gaad I ain't done nuthin'!"

"Well, what's the matter, have you gone crazy?"

"Naw, suh, naw, suh! Hide me. Hide me quick, Mr. Will!"

"But what for? What is wrong?"

"Oh, dey say Lys, dey say he done, dey say he, dey say—"

"Stop your chattering, and tell me what's the matter with you."

"Oh, Mr. Will, don't git mad at me, don't, don't, Mr. Will—"

"I'm not mad at you. What's happened?"

"Dey say Lys done attacted dat ar, dat ar—"

"Who?" thundered Mr. Robertson.

"Dat ar Susie Senter, dat ar Mr.—Mr. Senter's gal, you know, oh, Mr. Will, you know—dat ar—"

"You infernal scoundrel, you infernal scoundrel, you put him up to it," shrieked Mr. Robertson, as he kicked Madison away and broke loose from his hold.

"Naw, suh, naw, suh, Mr. Will, befo' Gaad I didn't know nuthin' about it. I ain't had nuthin' to do wid it. Oh, Mr. Will, don't let 'em git me. Don't let 'em git me! Oh, fo' Gaad's sake, Mr. Will! I ain't had nuthin' to do wid it!"

"Get up off of that ground! Stand up there!" commanded Mr. Robertson.

Madison rose, shaking, to his feet, but trembled so violently that he could hardly keep himself up.

"Here, Cyrus, strike this match and hold it to his face."

"I don't b'lieve I kin strike it, Mr. Will. I don't b'lieve I kin strike it!" chattered Cyrus.

"Come here, Madison. Stand close. I must see your face."

But he himself advanced to Madison, struck the match and by its flare in the windless night scrutinized the distorted countenance.

"You swear to me by all that's good and holy that you had nothing to do with this, Madison?"

"Naw, suh, naw, suh, befo' Gaad, Mr. Robertson, I don't know nuthin' about it. I ain't had nuthin' to do wid it. Oh, Mr. Will, Mr. Will!" he fell on the ground again, and reached to catch hold of the feet that had but just kicked him, "dey's a-comin', dey's a-comin', oh, we ain't got no time, we ain't got no time—"

"Take him up there in the barn, Cyrus, and hide him under that loose hay. Bury down under it, Madison, and stay still—still, do you hear?"

"Oh, yassuh, Mr. Will, oh, yassuh, Mr. Will, you ain't gwine to let 'em, you ain't gwine to let 'em—"

"No, I'm not going to let 'em get you to-night. Cyrus, as soon as you've hid him, you get to bed and stay there, pull off your clothes, and whatever happens, you be asleep."

"Yassuh, yassuh, Mr. Will, I sho' will be asleep. Don't you worry, Mr. Will, I sho' will be asleep."

"Pick him up then and come on. I'll see you help him up the ladder."

Mr. Robertson stood by to see them climb into the loft, and waited until Cyrus came, half sliding, half falling, down again.

"Did you hide him good, Cyrus?"

"Y-yassuh, I put him under all dat hay," and Cyrus started on a run.

"Stop," commanded Mr. Robertson, "where are you going so fast?"

"I—I wuz jes gwine to git in de bed befo' nuthin' happens," declared Cyrus.

As agitated as he was, Mr. Robertson could not restrain a smile, "Well," he said, "I reckon that is the best place for you."

Cyrus left at top speed.

Mr. Robertson returned to the sitting-room, resumed his seat, and picked up the book again, thinking half subconsciously, "I had better be reading when they come."

Though he held the book open, it was impossible for him to read. His mind was in a turmoil. What had happened? And how far was he responsible for it? Was Madison really innocent? Was it right to hide him? There would certainly be a mob. Was it right to turn Madison over to their fury to-night? What should he say when they came? If they found Madison, what would they think of Will Robertson? What was his duty to Sim Senter? If there was to be a lynching, what? "Oh, I wish to God I had driven that Ulysses away!" he exclaimed. "And poor, little, unfortunate Susie! God knows her lot was hard at best. And now this, this! Oh, it's horrible! It's awful beyond words. Oh, I wonder if he killed her. Is she dead? But it may be better so. God! it may be better so!"

He heard steps on the porch, the sound of many feet, then a knock at the door. The book fell from his hands. He staggered into the hall and called, "Who's there?"

"It's me, Rod Parker, Will," answered from the darkness the voice of the sheriff of Compton county.

"Come in, Rod, what do you want?"

"No, you'd better come out here, Will."

Mr. Robertson hurried out, glad of the protection of the dark, "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Them Mulberry niggers have outraged Sim Senter's girl," said the sheriff. There were eight or ten men with him.

"Is she dead? Did they kill her?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"No, she ain't dead. Dr. Anderson is down there now. I've got my posse divided lookin' for them niggers. I've got one bunch lookin' through the creek bottom now, an' I want you and Bob to come with us. Both of you git your guns."

"Bob? Bob is not of age."

"He is old enough to shoot," answered the sheriff, "we've got to capture the niggers and we've got to protect 'em from the mob. But God damn 'em, I'd give a thousand dollars if I wasn't sheriff to-night."

"Wait a minute and I will wake Bob." He hurried up the stairs, woke Bob, told him to get his gun and dress as fast as he could. Then he went to Mrs. Robertson. "Mamie, darling," he said, "Bob and I have to go with the sheriff and help capture Ulysses Mulberry. He has outraged Susie Senter."

"Not Bob! not Bob!" she cried.

"Yes, Bob, too, honey."

"Oh, one of you will be killed. Oh, Will, both of you may be killed!"

"No, sweetheart, no. There's not much danger."

She had clung to his embrace, but now she snatched

herself free and ran to Bob's room, threw her arms around him and wailed, "Oh, Bob, Bob, oh, my son! my son!"

"What is it, Mama? Oh, what is it?"

"Oh, you have to go with the sheriff. Oh, you will be killed."

"What for?" cried Bob, "what for? What have I done?"

Mr. Robertson came in, "Listen now," he said, "Bob, you and I have to help capture Ulysses Mulberry. He has assaulted Susie Senter."

"Oh, the infernal scoundrel!" said Bob. "Turn me loose, Mama." And he tore himself from her arms.

She fell prone on the bed. "Hurry, Bob," said his father, "I'll send Cindy up here to stay with Mama. That's all we can do." He rushed downstairs and out into the back yard. There he beat upon the door of Cindy's house. "Cindy! Cindy!" he shouted. "Dress and come into the house. Miss Mamie wants you!"

But no sound came from within. Then he bethought himself, "I told Cyrus to be asleep whatever happened. Neither of them will ever get up for anything outside of the house. What am I going to do?"

He groped his way to the nearby wood-pile, got a stick of cord-wood, and battered in the door. "It's me, Mr. Will," he cried. "Get out of that bed, Cindy! Get up, Cyrus, and saddle the horses for Bob and me!"

"How kin I git out of de bed wid you in hyeer, Mr. Will?" faltered Cindy.

He caught her fat arm and jerked her to the floor. "Don't stop to dress. Run, run, like you are, to Miss Mamie's room. No, to Mr. Bob's room. She is in there."

Cindy fled.

"Hurry, Cyrus, and saddle those horses!"

"Mr.—Mr. Will, I couldn't make de tongue and buckle meet. I's tarrified, Mr. Will. I's plumb tarrified!"

"Well, put on your clothes, and go and sit in the hall. Take care of Miss Mamie. Bob and I have to go with the sheriff."

Mr. Robertson ran to the barn, saddled the horses, and rode swiftly to the front, leading Saladin. He found Bob dressed and armed on the porch with the sheriff and his posse.

"How is she, Bob?" he asked.

"Cindy is there, and she is sitting up."

"She will recover herself after a little. I told Cyrus to stay in the hall downstairs."

"Well, are we ready?" asked Rod Parker. "But, Will, you haven't got any gun!"

"Oh, I forgot that, lend me one of yours."

The sheriff handed him a revolver. "Take that," he said, "and now the question is, where to go? We think one of them niggers started up this way."

"What do you say about it, Mr. Hiram?"

Mr. Hiram's voice answered, "I don't know, I'm ready to go anywhere."

"What do you say, Randy?"

"Don't that new nigger preacher stay over hyeer at Uncle Peter Higgins's?" asked Randy Shallow.

"Yes, but what's he got to do with it?" said Mr. Robertson.

"Oh, I don't know, Will, but I've got a sort of hunch that if a nigger hyeer wuz to git into this kind of trouble, and we kinder surrounded him, he'd make for that preacher, 'specially if he wuz a young nigger that had been to the City."

"Randy's right," said Tony Peters, "what do you think, Rod?"

"It's as good luck as any," answered the sheriff, "but if he wuz an old nigger an' hadn't really done it, I bet he'd take a chance on comin' to Will Robertson. I don't know whether Madison had anything to do with it or not. I don't much think he did, but anyways Lys is the main one we want. So we'll chance Richard Sanders."

The cavalcade started. Mr. Robertson, riding by the side of the sheriff, said, "Tell me about it, Rod."

"Well, about four o'clock this evenin' they found Susie mighty nigh dead in one of them big gullies in that brush close to the plum thicket. They had to take her home. They had to come and git the doctor and me. I got up a posse, and when we got down there it was about dark. Susie hadn't come to enough to tell us much. They ought to have looked for her quicker, but her mother said she thought Susie was staying a while with her daddy and the boys in the field, till the old gray mule came in with nobody in the buggy. Then she had to send one of the chillun to the field. And it all took time. Me and the posse went over to the Mulberry place. Madison an' Lys wasn't there. The old woman hadn't seen 'em since dinner, she said. The chillun didn't know anything about 'em. I left the posse there to scour the creek bottom, with Judge Mowry at the head of 'em.

"Then I come back to town and got up some more men and sent 'em down to Judge Mowry. And I had to telephone all the near-by towns. Then I got up this bunch, and here we are."

"Well, nobody knows then who actually did commit the assault?"

"No, not for certain. But I expect by this time that Dr. Anderson has got Susie around to where she can tell. I left Squire Meekin down to the court house to git the news, and everybody was to report to him. And whenever we catch one of the niggers we are to fire off three shots, and if we git both of 'em, five shots. And they are to be brought to Squire Meekin and clapped in the jail and a guard thrown around it."

"But there will be a thousand men in town to-night from all the country round. Do you think we ever could get the niggers into the jail?"

"No, I don't think so. I believe my posse itself will go back on me and turn into a mob, but what else can I do?"

"You can't do anything else unless you happen to find 'em yourself, and then maybe you could slip 'em into the jail without giving the signal."

"I can try that," said the sheriff, "but you know, as well as I do, that even this bunch that I've got here with me ain't goin' to stand for that. And if we got 'em into the jail, I don't know as it would do much good. The only safe thing would be to git 'em out of the county."

"And we could hardly do that to-night," said Mr. Robertson.

"No, not likely," answered the sheriff, "but I've got an automobile all ready at the back of the jail, and I figgered that if we could once git him inside and things got too squally, maybe I could rush him through the jail into the car and then light out with him for Simpson

county. But we will wait and see, and do the best we can when the time comes."

Amid a great barking of dogs they reached Uncle Peter Higgins's house. It was a ceiled and painted house of six rooms, for Uncle Peter owned his farm, had no rent to pay, and had been thrifty and saving all of his life. Richard Sanders boarded with him.

"Surround the house, boys," the sheriff commanded softly, "and have your guns ready. Shoot the dogs, if necessary. Come with me, Will, and we'll knock on the door."

To their loud knocks responded Uncle Peter's voice, "Who dar?"

"It's the sheriff, Uncle Peter, open the door."

"Yassuh, right away, soon as I kin git up, and strike a light."

Uncle Peter came to the door with a lamp in one hand, shading the top of the lamp chimney against any draft with the other.

"What were you doing awake, Uncle Peter?"

"I jest now waked up, Mr. Rod. I hyeered sich a miration 'mongst de dawgs."

"Do you know what we've come for?"

"Naw, suh," said Uncle Peter, "but I knows I ain't done nuthin'. You couldn't want me."

"No, I don't want you, but I want to see Richard Sanders."

"He sho' ain't done nuthin', Mr. Rod! He ain't done nuthin', is he? Oh, sho'ly he ain't done nuthin'! Who you got wid you, Mr. Rod?"

"I've got the house surrounded. Nobody inside can get out, and they'd better not try. Where's Richard Sanders?"

"He's in his room, I reckon, Mr. Rod, but it's got a openin' on de side po'ch."

"Go inside there, Will, and watch the inside door," commanded the sheriff.

Mr. Robertson pushed by Uncle Peter, who exclaimed, "Lawd, Mr. Will! Whut is it, whut is it, Mr. Will? It must be somep'n awful bad if dey brought you out. Oh, Lawd, Mr. Will, whut is it?"

"It's as bad as can be," said Mr. Robertson. "Hold that lamp so it will shine on Richard's door. And shut up. Be quiet."

There came the sound of a loud knocking on the outside door of Richard's room. "Open, I know you are awake!" called the sheriff.

"Who is knocking?" came Richard's voice.

"The sheriff of Compton County! Open the door!"

"Do you come in the name of the law?" demanded Richard.

"Open that door, nigger, or I'll shoot through it. Of course I come in the name of the law."

Richard threw the door open. "First, Mr. Sheriff, I demand—" he began.

"You demand hell! Strike a light!"

"But I'm a citizen—"

The door back of him that opened on the inside of the house creaked on its hinges. "Watch out, Will," called the sheriff, "somebody's coming your way."

The door closed again.

"I deliver this man to you as the sheriff of Compton county," said Richard, "and I invoke for him the protection of the law. Come here, Brother Ulysses."

Mr. Robertson had taken the lamp from Uncle Peter and come with it through the inside door into the room.

It revealed Ulysses crouching in the middle of the floor. He began to crawl toward Mr. Robertson, all his bravado gone, and crying, "Mr. Will—"

"Don't touch me, you dirty beast, I'll kick you in the face," said Mr. Robertson.

"Wait, I'll put the cuffs on him," said the sheriff.

He walked forward, and snapped handcuffs on Ulysses' wrists. "And now," he said, "I arrest you, Richard Sanders, for aiding and abetting a known criminal to escape."

"He has been here for two hours. I wasn't going to try to help him escape from anybody except a mob. As soon as the excitement calmed down, I was going to bring him to you."

The men outside were growing impatient. "Have you got him? Have you got him?" one of them called.

"Hold your stands," shouted the sheriff, "he may be out any minute."

Mr. Robertson said, "Uncle Peter, did you know Ulysses was here?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Uncle Peter.

"Did you know what he had done?"

"He said he ain't done nuthin', an' de white folks wuz atter him," replied Uncle Peter.

"You knew that couldn't be so."

"Yassuh, yassuh, Mr. Will, but he begged so hard jes' to stay hyeer to-night, an' Brother Sanders said he'd keep him, an' tend to him to-morrer, an' I thought—"

"Do you know what he did?"

"Naw, suh, Mr. Will, I don't know. I don't know nuthin' about it."

"Do you know, Richard?"

"Yes, sir, I know what they suspect him of, but he says he is innocent."

"Do you believe he is innocent?"

"Well—well—I believe he ought to be turned over to the officers and—and have a fair trial."

"Rod," said Mr. Robertson, addressing the sheriff, "you know what's most likely to happen to Ulysses. There's no need to let it happen to Uncle Peter or Richard. I'll answer for them if they are ever needed. You couldn't expect them to do anything else than what they have done. We've got to fix it up somehow."

"Hurry up in there, we're comin' in," cried a voice from the outside.

"You manage it, Will," said the sheriff.

"We've got him," called Mr. Robertson, through the open door, "they had him tied in here, and Richard was just starting to town to notify the officers." Then he said in a low voice to Uncle Peter, "Hand me that rope that's hanging up in the hall there."

Uncle Peter handed him the rope. The men came swarming in and saw Mr. Robertson with the rope in his hand. Then their eyes fell on Ulysses still crouching to the floor. They burst into wild curses and pressed forward to get their hands and feet on the prisoner. "Wait, wait, wait, men, for God's sake!" cried the sheriff.

"Remember, boys, we are officers of the law," protested Mr. Robertson.

"Put that rope around his neck!" cried Randy Shallow.

The rope was snatched from Mr. Robertson's hands. "Wait, wait, till we git him to town," implored the sheriff, "he's got to be identified. Wait till we hear what Susie has said."

"Yes, less wait, boys," said Mr. Hiram.

"Hold on here, Randy, that's right, less wait," said Tony Peters.

"Wait, hell! we'll hang him here!" cried a voice.

"No, no, we'll take him to town and burn him," cried another.

"Come here, Bob," commanded Mr. Robertson. Bob emerged from the crowd at the door. "Rod, Tony, Hiram, come here." They came to him as called. "Now," he said, "we're going to take this nigger to jail and we are going to do it in an orderly fashion. The first man that touches him has got to reckon with us.

"Bob, you and Rod, take him and put him on my horse behind the saddle. Hiram, you and Tony, follow behind him. The rest of you, get out of the way, fall back there."

Marvelously, all obeyed him. He was the last to leave the room. Before going, he said in a low voice, "Richard, you and Uncle Peter leave here and leave quick. Ride east away from Compton as fast as you can go."

When they started back to Compton, the sheriff commanded, "Now, boys, we're going to slip him into jail. Don't none of you fire that signal."

He was answered by a snigger from the darkness. They rode in silence until they were within half a mile of the town. Then suddenly the silence was broken by the three shots. "Who fired that gun?" shouted the sheriff angrily.

"Never mind now, Rod," said Mr. Robertson, "we've got to make a dash for it. Come on!" He prodded his horse with his heels. It broke into a run. "Come on, Bob! Rod! Tony! Hiram!" he shouted. But all around could be heard the answering signals, first near at hand,

then farther and farther away, up and down the creek bottom, east and west, north and south. "My God," he cried, "it's hopeless!"

And it was hopeless. As they entered the town, they were surrounded by a mob of infuriated men, who snatched Ulysses from the horse and dragged him to the court house square. There they milled and swarmed around him, firing irregular volleys into the air and yelling like wild beasts.

A piercing voice was heard, "Git a rope, git a rope."

Ten voices answered, "Here's a rope! Here's a rope. Let me git to him."

"Naw, naw," called others, "hangin's too good for him. We're goin' to burn him!"

Judge Mowry had come. He climbed to the steps that led over the court house fence. Somebody had procured torches. Their light showed him standing erect. His powerful voice penetrated the tumult. "Fellow citizens," he said, "we've got to have some order about this thing."

Those near stopped their clamor and gradually the quietness spread outward to the edges of the crowd. "Fellow citizens, I report that the victim of an unspeakable outrage has identified her assailant. She says it was this brute we have here, and him alone. What shall we do with him? Shall we—"

He got no further. "Hang him! Burn him! Burn him! Hang him! Burn him! Burn him!"

Sim Senter was carried to the front and lifted to a place by the side of Judge Mowry. "There's Sim. Sim, what do you say, Sim?" yelled the crowd.

In the flickering light Sim's face loomed a picture of

grief, horror, fury, "I say burn him, God damn him!" he shrieked.

But somehow Brother Maxcy had attained a position by his side, "No, no," he cried, "men, I beseech you, I beg you in the name of the law, in the name of God—"

"Ha, the parson!" yelled the crowd, "the parson. Ha! ha! ha! the parson, pull him down, throw him out. Knock him down, Sim."

Sim, infuriated, drew back his hand to deal the blow, but his arm was caught by Judge Mowry, "No, no, Sim," he commanded, "Maxcy, get down, get away from here quick!"

"Oh, men, brothers, you will repent this—" Brother Maxcy implored, but he was seized from behind, dragged down, and pushed, shoved, and hustled to the outer edge of the crowd.

"Burn him, burn him, burn him!" was shrieked from all sides.

"All right, boys, tie him to the fence! Here's the stuff to burn him with." Advancing through the crowd came two men with a railroad tie. "There's a pile of 'em back there!"

Ropes were brought with miraculous swiftness, and the shrieking prisoner was tied to the fence with a hundred knots. "Oh, Gaad," he cried, "oh, Mr. Will, Mr. Will, oh, Jedge, oh, Jedge, oh, Mr. Will, don't let 'em, don't let 'em—!"

Somebody struck him a blow in the mouth that stifled his cries. A line of men came bringing railroad ties. They built a close pen of these pine ties around him. Two men struggled to get through the crowd with a barrel of kerosene taken from a store. "Let us pour it on," they yelled, "let us pour it on!"

Way was made for them. They drenched the wood with the oil. Suddenly above all noises was heard a piercing shriek, "I will light it. I will light it. Git out of the way, I will light it." And Harry, a torch in his hand, came pushing, struggling, to the front. His was the face of a fury, as his eyes met the convulsed features of Ulysses, "Damn you, damn you, I've got you," he shrieked, "oh, ha! ha! ha! I've got you!"

He applied the torch to the oiled wood. As the flames shot up, he drew the torch back, and dashed it with all his strength straight into the immovable face of Ulysses. "There, take that! Take that from me. Oh, ha! ha! ha! take that from me!" He sank insensible to the ground and was dragged away.

The flames caught the wood and crackled. There was the sickening odor of burning flesh. Human voices fell silent. All eyes were fixed in a stare of horrid fascination on the billowing fire. Then from the midst of the crowd was heard, "Damn 'em, I love to hear 'em fry!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE newspaper reporters who came speeding to Compton the next morning, found a depressed town. An unnatural quietness prevailed. It was Saturday, but no Negroes were visible, and the few whites on the street showed in their gait and attitudes the reaction from the intense excitement of the night before, but under this reaction could be sensed the odor of a dying exultation mingled with defiance and guilt. It was as if they felt that the outside world were judging them harshly, that in part they deserved the censure and were ashamed, but that also the outside world did not fully understand, and that at any rate they had shown that world that theirs was a white man's country in which the white race would tolerate no assaults on its integrity.

In answer to a wire from the governor, the sheriff answered that all was quiet and he anticipated no further trouble. Squire Meekin held an inquest, and a verdict was returned that Ulysses Mulberry came to his death at the hands of unknown parties. The court-house fence was repaired, and all ashes were cleared away, but there were those who picked up little pieces of bone for souvenirs. Word was brought in that the body of a Negro, shot to death, was found by the side of the road two miles west of Compton. He turned out to be a Negro strange to the community, who had had the bad luck to pick out that night for traveling.

Over on the old Benton place the folks slept the sleep of exhaustion till ten o'clock in the morning, and then

Mr. Robertson had to wake Cindy to cook breakfast. Bob and Mrs. Robertson did not come down till the meal was announced.

"Oh, it was horrible, horrible!" said Mrs. Robertson.

"Yes, honey, it was—too horrible to think about," answered her husband.

"I never can quit thinking about it," said Bob. "I know I shall always have the picture of it in my mind."

"Couldn't you do anything, Will?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"No, I had Ulysses up behind me, but so many men crowded up and grabbed me all at once that I was helpless. Of course I might possibly have shot one or two of them—"

"Oh, I am glad you didn't do that," said his wife. "I thank God that we are spared that."

"Yes, and it wouldn't have done any good."

"Might you not have ridden straight east away from Compton and so have brought the prisoner safe to some other jail?"

"He couldn't have done that," said Bob, "because the men outside there where I was, said that they bet Papa and Mr. Parker were going to try to save that nigger, but that they were going to watch out and were not going to stand for anything like that."

"Yes, Rod and I both knew there wasn't any use in trying to start east," said Mr. Robertson.

"But after all there wasn't any doubt about his guilt, was there?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"No, I suppose not," answered her husband, "Judge Mowry said that Susie had identified him."

"Well, it's awful, but it may be best as it is," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Oh, I can't think that! I can't think that!" exclaimed Mr. Robertson. "But—but the trouble is that I don't know what is right. Still it can't be right to burn a human being alive."

"Oh, Papa, wasn't it horrible?" said Bob with a shudder. "And yet at the time I felt somehow sorter—sorter like the others there. Didn't you, Papa?"

"Yes, son, I am ashamed to say I did."

"But, Will, you didn't leave Bob there to—to look at it all, did you?"

"No, Bob and I got separated, but I found him, and then we took Brother Maxcy home. He was rather roughly handled. One of his legs was sprained and he was bruised about the face and body."

"Oh, tell me about it. How did it happen? What was he doing there? Was he badly hurt? Oh, was he badly hurt?"

"No, not so badly," and Mr. Robertson gave her an account of Brother Maxcy's attempted protest. "And when we got him home," he finished with a smile, "Sister Maxcy was kissing and petting him one minute and berating him the next for having exposed himself to such danger. She would laugh to have him back and cry for what he had gone through. But we managed to get him to bed at last, and then most of the worst of it was over when we came back by the court-house."

"Is there danger of anything more, Will?"

"No, I don't think so, but I've got to go and see, so I may know what to do with Madison."

"With Madison! Where is he?"

"He's out in the barn."

"Oh, Will, Will, you didn't leave him here last night when you went away, did you?"

"Yes, I didn't have time to do anything else with him."

"Oh, if I had known that, I couldn't have stood it. To think, that horrible creature was here in the barn and you went off and left me! Oh, Will, how could you?" Mrs. Robertson burst into tears.

"Now, Mamie, now, honey, Madison couldn't have harmed a mouse last night. He was scared to death. Nothing short of fire could have made him move out of that barn. But I'll have to go to town to tell Rodney Parker about it to-day, and see how he thinks we ought to handle him."

"Will," said Mrs. Robertson amid sobs, "there's one thing. Bob has got to stay here with me till you get that demon off the place. Oh, Will, think of what might have happened last night! I don't know, I don't know, yes, I think they ought to be burned!"

"Now, Mama, I'm going to stay here with you, right with you," said Bob.

"I never would have believed your Papa would have done that," she said.

"I tell you, Mamie, there wasn't a particle of danger!" He felt he was right, but in his mind there was an uneasiness, as he looked back, that could not be put down. He knew that he could have persuaded the sheriff to leave either him or Bob at home, and he felt that Cindy and Cyrus might not have been a very effective guard, they were already so frightened. What if revenge had overcome fear in Madison? What then? What would he then have wanted to do with Madison? He couldn't bear the thought of what might have happened. "Well," he said, "I am sorry, Mamie. I was trying to do what seemed right. And it turned out there was no danger.

Good-by, dear, I must go to town." And he hurried away without waiting for her reply.

She buried her face in her arms on the table and wept.

Bob sat confused, not knowing what to say.

After a little while, she rose, telling Bob that she would go to her room.

Shortly before noon Mr. Robertson returned. He found Bob sitting dismally in the front hall. "All is quiet in town," he said. "Rod Parker and I decided it would be best to wait till dark and then take Madison to jail. He can be kept there a few days before anybody much will know it, and then there will be no further danger at all. Where's your mother?"

"She's upstairs," answered Bob.

After dinner, to which Mrs. Robertson did not come down, Bob was too restless to sleep. His father had commanded him not to go to town, not to leave the place, and had then returned upstairs, carrying his mother's dinner to her. Bob wandered through the house from room to room downstairs, sat down, got up again, tried in vain to read, walked up and down the porch, and then there came to his memory, "The spring is a mighty nice cool place in this hot weather."

So he concluded to go to the spring. In his mind was the picture of Ulysses tied to the fence and being walled about with the cross ties, then of the billowing flames now and again parted, or swept to one side, by a current of air, allowing a glimpse of their charred victim. He kept thinking that his feeling ought to be one of pure and unmixed horror, but it wasn't. Something savage in him billowed and flared up like those flames, despite his efforts to put it down. The recollection was repulsive,

but mixed with it was a craving and the idea of flesh, of naked, quivering flesh grasped in bare hands.

It was a difficult task for Mr. Robertson to placate his wife. Again and again she told him, "You knew that I am not easily frightened, but that over all of us white women here hangs forever that dark shadow. The danger is always there. In our nightmares we fancy a black hand at our throats, the evil breath of a black body burning our faces."

He repeated over and over, "But, Mamie, you know that such occurrences are very rare. And almost never has it happened that a woman of your standing has been attacked. And here were Cindy and Cyrus."

"What could they have done?" she would answer. "What would they have done? And suppose Cyrus and Madison had joined forces. Oh, Will, think of that! Cindy would have run, howling. And I—"

"No, honey, no. It is unthinkable that such a thing would have happened. As against Madison, Cyrus would have defended you with his life, and Cindy would have fought like a tigress. They were afraid of a mob, of a white mob, not of a man of their own color. And then Madison wouldn't do anything of that sort himself."

"You didn't know, Will. Nobody can really know, but on a theory you risked your wife."

One time he said most unluckily, "But I owed a duty to the community, to humanity."

It took an hour of entreaty and lavished endearments to assuage her after that. And it was not until he had acknowledged repeatedly that he was wholly wrong, that he had acted under the overwhelming excitement of the moment, that he was not himself, and to such acknowl-

edgments had added time and again protestations that he loved her beyond words to express, that she was finally placated.

She told him then to leave her and see what Bob was doing after the fearful ordeal to which he had been subjected.

Two hours afterwards at supper she was serene. The only trace of lingering resentment that she showed, was the addressing of most of her conversation to Bob.

About nine o'clock the sheriff drove to the front door in a motor car. Madison was led from the barn, and delivered to him. And he drove away with his prisoner as one surrendered by his bondsman on the charge of hog theft. But both the sheriff and Mr. Robertson knew that Madison's chances of the lightest sentence for that felony were gone glimmering. The best he could hope for, after all that had happened, was the longest possible term in the penitentiary that the law allowed for such a crime. And Mr. Robertson could not help reflecting that such action on the part of the jury, though illogical, would be natural.

That night Mrs. Robertson said, "Will, you do love me, don't you?"

"Yes, honey, of course I love you better than anything else in the world."

"Leave out the 'of course,' Will."

"Yes, dear, I love you better than anything else in the world."

"Then kiss me, Will, and hold me tight, tight."

CHAPTER XXIII

NEXT morning at Sunday-school, Minnie Deane made pretty eyes at Bob, but he avoided her glances. In the interval between Sunday-school and church, he did not seek her out as heretofore, but he went outside of the building, and loafed near the entrance and under the neighboring trees, and talked with the other boys about the lynching. Most of them vied with each other in trying to relate details that had escaped general observation. Their verdict was unanimous that Ulysses had got no more than what was justly due him, and to this they added the sentiment that they reckoned this would hold the niggers down for a while. The Sunday-school lesson that they had just finished reciting had for its Golden Text, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," and went on to tell how Saul of Tarsus was "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers," and to admonish, "and these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Jasper Deane, junior, said, "Didn't old Harry swat him a good one though with that torch?"

And his brother, Willie, added, "I bet you I would have hit him twice."

"Yes, you would have done a lot," jeered Tom Parker,

the sheriff's son, "you've got just about spunk enough to wring a chicken's neck, and that's all."

"Well," answered Willie, "I didn't see your dad do so much. It was his duty to put the prisoner in jail."

"Hunh! he didn't try. He could have put him there if he had wanted to. But your dad stayed at home in bed. He had a pain and couldn't do nothing. Ha! ha! ha! I know—he had a pain in his gizzard! Or maybe he was skeered it would cost him something. He's always got a pain in his pocket-book."

"You are a liar," cried Jasper, junior.

There was danger of its coming to blows, when Jared Peters interposed with: "They tell me that Mr. Will Robertson was the principal one that caught him."

"Well, that's a lie," said Tom Parker, "somebody is always trying to make out that Mr. Will Robertson runs this town, and he don't, not by a long shot."

"How about it, Bob, you was with 'em, wasn't you? I heard Papa say you was with 'em."

"Yes, I was there," said Bob, "and—"

"I wisht the gang I was with had ha' caught him," interrupted Jasper, junior, "I bet you we never would've brought him in alive, or anyhow we'd have shot him up some and burnt him afterwards." He made a gesture with his left hand that brought into striking evidence the fact that he had lost his little finger.

"Yes, they did put him out of his misery too quick," said Jared.

"Oh, I don't know," said Tom Parker, "you fellers make me sick talkin' about what you would have done, and what ought to have been done, and all that. The nigger was burned plumb up, wasn't he?"

"It looks to me like that was enough," said Bob.

"Hunh, Randy Shallow said your dad didn't want to burn him at all, nor hang him, nor do nothing except put him in jail to be tried," said Jared.

"Well, I'll swear!" said Jasper, junior.

"Mr. Will always was a sort of milk and water feller," said Tom Parker, "and Bob don't miss him far."

"Take that back," said Bob, advancing on him belligerently, "or I'll—"

"Well, don't git huffy," answered Tom, laughing provokingly, "I'll take it back. Anyhow, we can't fight right here before the church."

"I'll fight you now or any other time," declared Bob angrily.

"Hunh, ain't Bob gittin' bold since Harry Senter licked him?" taunted little Willie Deane.

"He's a regular Goliah the second," said Jasper, junior.

"I thought Bob was aimin' to git to be one of the Deane family," said Tom, "how about that, Jasper?"

But Mr. Hiram Shorter came to the door of the church and beckoned, saying, "Come in, boys, the service is beginning."

Bob was surprised, but relieved, to see no sign that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be administered, although it was the first Sunday of the month. On the table within the chancel rail was no cover of white cloth peaked up in the center. On a Communion Sunday Bob knew the covering would be there, and that the peak would be made by the height of the silver pitcher that contained the grape juice that had been substituted for the wine of his childhood, and he knew that with the silver pitcher of grape juice would be two silver goblets and a silver platter holding the unleavened bread. Bob held the sacrament in a peculiar reverence,

and could not get over the idea that he who ate and drank unworthily, ate and drank to his own damnation. And in the light of his recent past conduct he could not think of himself as eating and drinking worthily.

During the opening hymn and prayer he had time to reflect on his conversation with the other boys, or, rather, that conversation ran idly through his mind. He knew that all of them talked much more savagely than they really felt, that they would be ashamed to show any softness, but wished rather to produce on each other the impression of hardy valor. Not that Bob expressed it so clearly to himself, but the hazy recognition of it was in his brain. Then it came to him that the Deane boys seemed decidedly hostile, and he wondered what they knew. He didn't care so much about them, but what they knew would soon be known to everybody. And Bob didn't know how he could live past the fact of that knowledge getting to his father and mother. Church made a fellow feel bad, anyway, and he wished he didn't have to come.

Brother Maxcy in the pulpit, pulling himself up by grasping the reading desk, rose unsteadily to his feet. His face showed many bruises. "For the two lessons, I will read the Sunday-school lesson of to-day and that for next Sunday, July the tenth," he said, and proceeded to read about Saul of Tarsus, the giving of the Law, and the martyrdom of Stephen at the hands of a mob, with Saul consenting unto his death.

Then he announced as his text, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

As the sermon progressed, Jasper Deane, junior, gazed for relief at the ceiling, then out of the window, then he

cut his eye at Jared Peters and found that he was sniffling. A tear started in Jasper, junior's, eye, welled up over the lower lid, and fell tumbling down on his Sunday shirt. Tom Parker held out valiantly for a longer time, but at last he bowed his head on the seat in front of him and sobbed. Bob buried his face in his handkerchief, and had to blow his nose time and again, while little Willie Deane collapsed utterly.

The older members of the congregation were also deeply moved, especially the men. The women had at least taken no active part in the mob, and that was now something of a salve to their consciences, though many of them, too, wept.

Near the close of the sermon Brother Maxcy said, "I perceive from your tears that the love of Christ is in you, but I have decided not to have the Communion to-day, because we are unworthy to partake of it. After a week of prayer and repentance, it may be that some of us may dare, trembling, to approach the table of the Lord's Supper, but not now. A blood-guiltiness is on our souls. We have not searched ourselves sufficiently to know whether or not, or how much, our sloth or greed or indifference or self-righteousness was responsible for the crime of Ulysses Mulberry, as our craven fear and demoniac rage were responsible for the torture of his death."

Immediately after the sermon, he pronounced the benediction, and with streaming eyes, sank exhausted into his chair.

As the congregation filed out of the church, it was as if they had been released from a spell. A feverish gaiety of talk about other things sprang up among them. But the boys first cast sheepish glances at each other,

trying to determine how much their emotion had been noticed by their companions. Almost at once they began to cast about for devices to build up again their pretence of hardness. It was maddening to think that they had acted the part of "sissies."

Minnie Deane managed to come out side by side with Bob. "Hello, Bob," she said, "have you got a cold?"

"No, I haven't," said Bob, "but I saw you crying, too."

"Oh, I didn't know you were condescending to throw a look at me," she answered.

"Now, Minnie, I—you know—I," stammered Bob.

"Minnie, Minnie," Mrs. Deane's voice was heard, "where is Minnie?"

"Here I am, Mama."

"Well, come on, we're going, Papa wants to start the car." She came up, caught Minnie's arm, and saying icily, "Good morning, Bob," hurried her daughter away.

"I don't blame her," thought Bob, "I'm not fit for anything. But who is fit for anything here? But Papa didn't stand by consenting to the lynching, and he lives right, too. Oh, Papa is one of the best men in the world! But what am I?"

When the Deanes reached home, and Mr. and Mrs. Deane were left alone together, Jasper, senior, said, "Well, I think Brother Maxcy went too far. After all is said and done, there is a lot of difference between Ulysses Mulberry and Stephen, the martyr. And as for our greed or anything else being responsible for Ulysses' crime, that's all stuff and nonsense. It makes me tired, and I think we'd better get a preacher who understands us, and has got something practical about him."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Mrs. Deane, "he had me

crying and there were tears in your eyes, too, but martyrdoms for the love of Christ and lynchings for outrages of women are mighty different things. And what are we going to do with these niggers, men and women, I'd like to know? They are getting more uppity every day, and nothing we can do, will keep 'em down. They are ruining our boys and girls, that's what they are doing, and what they are going to keep on doing."

"Yes, educate 'em, educate 'em, educate 'em, he says. And I'd like to know what good that's going to do. And be kinder to 'em and build better houses for 'em, and let 'em have more money, and set 'em better examples, and deal more fairly with 'em, and all that. What does a nigger care for good examples and kind treatment? What he wants is an easy time and plenty of women, and grub and fine clothes that he don't have to work for, that's what he wants. I say make 'em work, make 'em work, and if they do wrong, punish 'em, that's what I say."

"And hold 'em away from our boys and girls," added Mrs. Deane.

"Yes and that, too," agreed Jasper, senior, "and all the talk about Christian treatment of 'em, and about their being the white man's burden, and about our responsibility for them before God, that's all foolishness, and never will come to anything. They were slaves, they were born to be slaves, and they are not fit for anything else! Educating them is wasting the money and ruining the nigger."

"Yes, that's true, Jasper, but I've been looking over the catalogues, and I believe I've picked out a college for Minnie, if it suits you."

"I bet you've picked out the most expensive one," said Jasper.

"No, indeed I haven't. I have selected one where she can finish in two years."

"Well, that's long enough, and I suppose I'll have to send her somewhere, since Will Robertson is going to send Bob."

"But, Jasper, I've told you about Bob, and I want to break that up."

"Great God! Miriam, what are you talking about? I thought you were a practical woman. In the first place you don't really know anything against Bob. There is nothing but suspicion, and even if it's true, what does it amount to?"

"It amounts to a great deal, I think," said Mrs. Deane.

"Well, it don't. If you think you are going to git a tin angel for Minnie, you are mistaken. And Bob's an only child, and he will have the two farms, a thousand acres, not to speak of the fifteen hundred acres of timber land. If Will had had any business sense, he would have sold that timber two years ago. He could have got sixty thousand dollars. But no, he is going to save it and give it to Bob when he comes of age. That may be just as well though; Will would probably fritter away the money, or give it away, if he had it. The taxes on it keep Will's nose to the grindstone and the price has gone down, but the price will come back and he will likely keep the taxes paid. So it will be a good thing after all."

"But to think, Jasper, of Bob's marrying our daughter, after he, after he—"

"Oh, that will be done with and forgotten. Where are you going to find a young man around here—"

"Surely, surely, Jasper, there must be some."

"Oh, there may be one now and again, but what have they got?—nothing.—And then you never can know for certain, anyhow!"

"Jasper, you don't think that any of our sons—"

"Oh, I don't know. How should I know? But I think it would be a miracle—"

"But Bob as good as told Minnie. He said he wasn't worthy to touch her."

"Well, that speaks in his favor. Lots of 'em wouldn't feel that way. Or if they did, they wouldn't say anything about it. Bob has got a conscience like his father's, and it pesters him about everything."

"But certainly Mr. Robertson never was guilty of anything of that sort."

"Oh, well, we won't discuss that. If he was, it is past history now. And you know good and well there's not a better husband in Compton county than Will Robertson. The only thing the matter with him is he don't know the value of a dollar, and he is foolish about being so mortally easy on his niggers and poor folks that owe him money. But that don't keep him from being a good husband. And I'll manage to git in a lick or two on Bob myself, and keep him from throwing away what his daddy gives him. No, sir, Minnie couldn't do better, and you git that foolish notion out of your head. I want you to invite 'em all over to dinner or something, some time this week."

"Oh, it's horrible, horrible," said Mrs. Deane, bursting into tears, "how we are cursed with these niggers. Everybody calls us savages when we burn the men for outraging white girls, and the women go on day after

day ruining our boys. What are we to do? Oh, what are we to do?"

"Well, there's no need to cry about it," said Jasper, senior, "it's an old story. And we manage to git on pretty well. We brought the niggers here, and what would we do if we didn't have 'em to work for us?—We'd have to do all the work ourselves, or we'd have to git some foreigners or poor whites to do it. And I don't know that they'd be any better. I haven't heard that Massachusetts or France or New York or Italy is such a moral place. There may not be so many rapes there, I am not sure of that, but poor women the world over—"

"Well, then, the poverty of the women is the cause—"

"Yes, that's one of 'em. And that's one reason why I don't want any of my folks to be poor. And I'll let you know they are not going to be poor, either, not until after I die, and they are not going to have any excuse for being poor then," Mr. Deane finished triumphantly.

CHAPTER XXIV

At the Shady Grove Baptist church Richard Sanders preached on the text: "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

Late Saturday afternoon Richard and Uncle Peter had received news by the grapevine telegraph that it would be safe to come back, so they returned in the night. There had been some scattering talk about punishing them, but the death of Ulysses really slaked the thirst of the mob for vengeance, and those who did the talking about Richard and Uncle Peter were merely seeking to impress their hearers with their greater devotion to the doctrine of white supremacy, it seemed. So there was thought to be no actual danger after Friday night.

Whatever Richard may have felt, he was shrewd enough to know that the proper keynote for him to strike was reproof of his people for their carnality. He would be understood by his own people, the sermon might do them some good, and any news of it filtering to the white folks would make a good impression on them.

In going to the church the members of the congregation had avoided passing through town, as indeed all Negroes had withdrawn to themselves, avoiding the whites as far as practicable, since the lynching. But a larger congregation than usual was gathered for the services, which were held in the afternoon. That arrangement had been made by Richard for the convenience of several of his members, who were cooks for white people,

and therefore could not very well come in the forenoon. Among these was Cindy.

She sat now on the front seat, and ogled Richard with fervor and admiration, as he waxed warm in his denunciation of sins of the flesh. Approval, along with perspiration, exuded from her every pore, as she followed the discourse with emphatic nods of her head, and now and again with audible expressions of enthusiasm from her lips. But never for a moment did it enter her mind that all of this was anything else except just preaching. Richard Sanders was to her two different individuals—inside the pulpit he was a preacher, outside he was a man. In her opinion he acquitted himself as a preacher well, and she was beginning to entertain hopes of him as a man. Her fancy for Cyrus was waning.

Two or three benches farther back were Joe Williams and his family, and behind them Sally Ramsey, who had forsaken the Methodists since the advent of Richard. There were then at least two other pairs of feminine eyes besides Cindy's fastened on the preacher and glowing with thoughts of this world and the sweetness thereof. But of the three women only Lucindy Williams never doubted that the sermon was an index to the private conduct of Richard. Without ever having heard of psychology, Sally had a pretty definite idea that somehow or other Richard would probably feel after such a sermon that he had done his whole duty with reference to carnality and would be more susceptible to the proper advances. While Cindy regarded all sermons as delivered for public consumption and as having no practical bearing on individual behavior outside of the church.

After the services were over, Cindy hurried to congratulate the pastor. "Dat sho' wuz a powerful ser-

mon, Brother Sanders," she said. "I been a-thinkin' and a-thinkin' 'bout you. You ain't never out of my mind. You preaches so hard, and you don't never have no fun, a-studyin' and a-readin' in dem books all of de time. Whyn't you come to see folks some time? I don't never have nuthin' to do after eight o'clock."

"Thank you, Sister, I must pay more attention to pastoral calls."

"Dat's right, you must. Folks wants to git 'quainted wid you, and it ain't no piece from Brother Williams's house to mine," she said with a titter. "I been entertainin' preachers all my life. I likes 'em, and dey likes me."

"Well, I shall certainly try to come," answered Richard, smiling.

"Tuesday night will be a good time. I'll finish up wid de supper things quick an' be expectin' you 'bout eight o'clock."

"God willing, Sister, I'll try to come," answered Richard.

By advantage of sheer bulk Cindy had warded off the other members, but they were not to be put off longer, and attracted Richard's attention by pulling at his sleeves. He turned to this side and that to receive their praise, saying, "It's not me, but the Lord speaking through me. It is the coal from the altar that he has laid on my lips."

Joe Williams and his family managed to surround him, and Joe said, "Brother Sanders, you mus' come home wid us. Malviny and de gals has laid out a snack and it's dar a-waitin'. Lucindy say she boun' she gwine to show you whut a fried chicken is, an' I got two de biggest watermillons you ever seen a-layin' up in de cool."

"Nobody could resist so many attractions," said Richard, looking meaningly at the girls. Lucindy dropped her head, giggled, and rubbed the toe of her shoe on the floor.

They started down the aisle toward the door. Sally stood waiting between two benches. As they were passing, she caught the tail of Richard's coat, and gave it a gentle tug. To her face she held a beautifully clean handkerchief, from behind which she asked brokenly, "Brother—Brother Sanders, lem'me speak to you."

"Excuse me a minute," the pastor said to the Williamses, as he turned aside between the two benches and suffered Sally to draw him a short distance apart from the others.

"Oh, B-B-Brother Sanders," sobbed Sally, "I've been a sinner, an' I can't stand it no mo'. I can't stand to think about it. Whut is I gwine to do? Guide me, lead me, B-B-Brother Sanders."

"Dearly beloved sister, do you honestly and truly repent of your sins?"

"Oh, B-B-Brother Sanders, I c-can't stand it." Sally caught his hand fast in hers. "He'p me, he'p me."

"Repent and believe and be baptized, that's all, that's all," said Richard.

"But I don't know how, but I don't know how. You mus' tell me. You must set right down an' tell me now. Now is de 'cepted time."

Richard glanced around, the Williamses were waiting impatiently, and scorn was on their faces. "Sister, I must go now, but I will call and instruct you."

"No, no," sobbed Sally, "my folks ain't nuthin' but Methodists. I must come hyeer. I'm comin' to preachin'

to-night. You are g-g-gwine to preach agin to-night, ain't you, Brother Sanders?"

"Yes, and perhaps after services to-night—"

"Oh, kin I wait, oh, kin I wait till den? Don't, don't fail me, Brother Sanders. I don't know whut I would do if you wuz to fail me. Oh, my heart, how it hurts me! I been sich a sinner!"

"I won't fail you, I won't fail you, my sister," said Richard, patting her shoulder.

"I kin set hyeer a while and think about my sins, can't I, how I'm lost and ruint widout you, widout yo' he'p, B-Brother Sanders?"

"Yes, yes, my sister."

"I don't speck I'll leave hyeer, till you come back, Brother Sanders."

"Well, I'll hurry back to comfort and console you. Good-by, now."

"G-G-Good-by, Brother Sanders."

When Richard rejoined the Williamses, he said to Joe, "Many crowded around me to congratulate me, but my message seems truly to have found lodgment in the heart of Sister Sally Ramsey. She is deeply penitent, and I really think it is my duty to stay here with her."

"Naw, naw, Brother Sanders, you better leave her by herse'f for a while now," said Joe, restraining himself as best he could from some blasphemous utterance.

Malviny and the girls did not try to restrain themselves from audible sniffs of scorn as they cast contemptuous glances in the direction of Sally. But that guileful penitent's face was buried in her handkerchief, and her shoulders jerked convulsively with sobs of contrition.

After the snack had been disposed of at Joe's house, he said, "Brother Sanders, come wid me to de front room. I wants to talk wid you whilst Malviny an' de gals cleans up de dishes."

In the front room Richard asked, "What is it, Brother Williams? I really think I ought to hurry back to the church to instruct Sister Sally Ramsey, who is there alone struggling with the powers of darkness."

"Naw, it's best to let her struggle," said Joe. "We looks to you, Brother Sanders, all of us looks to you. An' we wants to know whut is we gwine to do 'bout all dese hyeer things."

"What things, Brother Williams?"

"Dese lynchin's an' things like dat. And I hyears dat de Ku-Kluxes is a-thinkin' 'bout comin' up hyeer, too."

"Well, in regard to the lynchings, I say, as I have said, that there is nothing to do except to behave ourselves. We can't do anything, and whatever we try to do in the way of revenge will come back on us. We are weak, Brother Williams, we are weak, and the white folks are strong. The Israelites were in bondage in Egypt till the good Lord saw fit to deliver them."

"Yaas, Brother Sanders, but is we Israelites?"

"Perhaps not exactly, but the Lord will guard his own. Brother Ulysses Mulberry was a scoffer and a scorner, anyway, but you, for example, are in no danger of being lynched."

"But didn't dey come mighty nigh to gittin' you and Brother Higgins?"

"Yes, but the Lord was with us."

"Yaas, I reckon dat's so, but from all I kin hyear,

if it hadn't ha' been for Mr. Will, dey would've got you."

"He was the instrument of the Lord," answered Richard, "but what our people must do, is to live better lives, learn more, and increase their possessions."

"You sho' is a sly one, Brother Sanders."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Dey ain't gwine to ketch you nappin' on no part of de ground."

"But I'm honest and sincere in what I say," answered Richard.

"Of c'ose, of c'ose, Brother Sanders, but whut about de Ku Kluxes if dey comes?"

"The same thing, let us behave ourselves!" said Richard, looking about restlessly as if anxious to leave.

"Hold on, wait, Brother Sanders, does you reckon dey gwine to treat dese white folks hyeer de same way dey been a-treatin' 'em in other places?"

"They say they are going to make everybody keep to his own color," answered Richard.

"Dat's right, dat's right, but kin dey do it, Brother Sanders?"

"Can you keep a secret, Brother Williams?"

"Yaas, yaas," answered Joe eagerly.

"No, they can't do it."

"Why can't dey?"

"All history is against them."

"How's dat?"

"Where two races continue to live side by side in the same country, either the less numerous race is swept aside and dies out, like the Indians, or it is absorbed, it is amalgamated with the other, like the Spaniards in Mexico."

"How you mean 'malgamated?"

"They mix and they mix till finally there is nothing left but the mixture."

"But white folks and niggers ain't never gwine to mix in no sich way as dat."

"They have pretty well done it already in some Central and South American countries," answered Richard.

"But if dey keeps on a-lynchin' us—"

"Lynchings can't stop anything, they never have. And besides, they are not going to keep on lynching themselves, for that would be foolish. And the main bulk of the amalgamation, if it ever comes, will be brought about, so the authorities say, through our women. This will happen unless we can arouse a pride of race in ourselves to match the pride of race that the white folks have. If our women thought it as shameful to have mulatto children as white women now do, then the races might be kept separate and distinct. But there is great danger in preaching racial pride, because it is so likely to increase racial hostility, and that should certainly be avoided if possible."

"I don't know," said Joe, "'bout all of dat, but it looks to me like if de white men didn't bother de colored women an' de colored men didn't pester de white women, we could all git along all right. An' dat's whut I'm in favor of doin'."

"You are right, Brother Williams, and that's the way of peace. But there will always be white men who will run with our women, and some of our women will always be proud to run with white men."

"If any of my women folks ever do it, I'll beat 'em mighty nigh to death, an' dey know it," said Joe.

"And as a rule our colored men would rather marry the lightest-skinned mulatto women they can find."

"Not me," said Joe, "you see Malviny."

"Yes, but I'm talking about the rule. We are trying to get away, most of us, from the black all of the time."

"De Lord made me black. Black I is, an' black I wants to stay," said Joe.

"It would be easier for us if we were all that way," answered Richard, "but black is a badge of contumely everywhere. Whatever we do, whatever we think, whatever we feel, whatever we know, still we are black, and so are objects of scorn to every white man, however ignorant or learned he may be."

"Of c'ose we ain't as good as white folks," said Joe.

"Perhaps not," answered Richard. "But I must be going, Brother Williams. Tell the ladies good-by for me and thank them for the repast."

"Don't rush off, Brother Sanders, I'm sho' Lucindy wants to talk wid you some."

"No, I'll have to be going." He picked up his hat from a chair.

"But lem'me ax you dis, Brother Sanders. You is a-workin' to make us better Christians an' de white preachers is a workin' to make de white folks better Christians, an' if you does any good an' dey does any good, ain't it boun' to be so, dat white and black will git further an' further apart, 'cause dey can't marry one another, an' dey ain't no other way but a sinful way?"

After a moment of hesitation, Richard answered, "Yes, that's so, Brother Williams, that's so. I hadn't thought of that."

On his way back to the church, he kept saying to him-

self, "It's funny I hadn't thought of that. What have I not suffered on account of being black? And yet my efforts, so far as they are good and so far as they are successful, will result in helping forever to keep black black, and white white. Unless—unless that law against intermarriage is repealed, and it won't be repealed, and nobody, black or white, would dare to advocate its repeal. And even the colored folks don't want everybody to become colored. What each one of them that thinks, really wants, is to be white, white, white! Oh, God! if I were only white! It is a wonder to me that any of us are Christians, that we can love a God that has made us black!

"What can I preach? What must I preach? I can preach only that we must make black honorable by greater sobriety, greater fortitude, greater virtue, but what's the use? I know it never will be done. The shadow of God's anger and hatred has been stamped upon our faces. No, no, that can't be! But it is better that God should have brought us here even through the bitter waters of scorn and slavery than to have left us to be naked savages in the jungles of Africa!

"The question I must keep before myself is, How can I best serve my people? And so far as I can see, it is to show them the road to greater economic freedom, and that road is the way of the Gospel, it is the way of mutual helpfulness, forbearance, endurance. Oh, God, if only I were white!"

When he entered the church, he saw that Sally was not in the place where he had left her, but looking around, he discovered her on one of the front benches at the side of the pulpit. She was leaning over with her face

buried in her hands. "How is it with you now, Sister Sally?" he asked.

"Oh, I had to come up hyeer to de mou'ners' bench, Brother Sanders, I can't do nuthin' but mou'n an' mou'n."

"I will pray with you, Sister Sally."

"No, not now, not yit," said Sally. "I ain't ready yit. I mus' mou'n an' mou'n. I been sich a powerful bad sinner, I can't do nuthin' but mou'n, mou'n."

"But surely I can help you."

"No, Brother Sanders, but maybe to-night after de preachin' is over, maybe den—I know I got to hyear you preach agin."

It was growing dusk. Other members of the congregation began to file in. Richard went to the door to welcome them, and then lit the lamps, which were fastened along the walls and behind the pulpit.

After the services which included a special prayer for the repentant sister, Sally stubbornly declined consolation from all of the volunteers, and declared that she must talk with Brother Sanders, that he alone could guide her. When the others had gone, she said, with tears in her eyes, "De folks at home will be a wonderin' where I is, Brother Sanders. An' I'm skeered to go home by myse'f. Would it be too much trouble for you to walk home wid me an' lem' me talk to you on de way?"

"No, certainly not. As soon as I put out the lights and close the church, I will go with you."

It was dark. They walked some distance in silence. "Well," said Richard, "what is your special trouble, Sister Sally?"

"Hol' my hand, please, Brother Sanders, it's so dark an' I done cried so much, I can't see where I'm a-steppin'."

Richard took her hand, and they walked on.

"Oh, Brother Sanders, I'm so weak I'm 'bleeged to set down a minute. Will you go back or will you stay wid me?"

"I will stay with you, Sister Sally."

"Den set down hyeer by de side of me, an' lem' me tell you," she nestled up close to him, "an' lem' me tell you, don't nobody keer nuthin' about me, Brother Sanders. An' dey all cast me off, till I hyeared you preach. An' den I say dere is a man whut's got a heart in him. He'll keer somep'n about me if I *is* a sinner."

"Yes, yes, Sister Sally."

"An' I felt like I want to put my head on yo' breas' an' my arms around yo' neck, an' say take me, take me, Brother Sanders, if I *is* a po' sinner, take me an' show me de way."

Sally suited her actions to her words. She threw her arms around Richard's neck, and rested her head on his breast, murmuring, "Take me, take me, Brother Sanders, if I *is* a po' sinner. Oh, I is sich a sinner, oh, Brother Sanders—"

Afterwards, when Richard had conducted Sally to her front gate and left her, she said to herself, "Hunh! Cindy an' Lucindy thinks dey is so smart!"

Richard, on his way back home, kept repeating to himself, "Yes, but even David had his Bathsheba."

CHAPTER XXV

THERE was no formal celebration of the Fourth in Compton. During the War and the two following years more attention had been paid to that holiday than at any time since the Civil War, but the town was perhaps relapsing into its former apathy, or it may have been that the lynching had something to do with the lack of interest.

The bank and some of the stores were closed for the day, and the post-office was run on half time. A few families went on picnics at near-by places along the creek bank, but the women, especially, felt little inclination to go far into the woods. The feeling of unrest or uneasiness had not wholly vanished from the community.

Brother Maxcy utilized the day by driving in his buggy from house to house collecting a sum of money for Susie Senter. On the morning of Tuesday, the fifth, he drove out to the old Benton place, and delivered a hundred dollars to Mr. Robertson, saying, "Will, would you mind giving this money to Susie? It might be that she would not like to see me, as I am pretty nearly a stranger to her. And yet I think I ought to go along, since it may be that she will see me, and I may be able to comfort her. All of us thought that if we could raise some money for her, she might be able to take a little trip, which would be good for her."

"Of course, I'll be glad to go," said Mr. Robertson, "Mamie and I would have gone before now, but Dr. Anderson said it would be best to wait a while."

"Yes, but he told me this morning it would be all

right for you and me to go to-day. But, oddly, he said he thought his patient could not yet bear to see any of the ladies, else my wife would be with me."

"Do you suppose it would be well for us to take Bob?"

"No, no, I think not," said Brother Maxcy. "I know she couldn't bear to see Bob."

"Well, we will drive in your buggy, then, on the road that leads through the farms by Uncle Peter's house. The bridges are too weak for the automobile."

On the way Brother Maxcy asked, "Will, did you ever think how attractive this country is with its alternation of hill and valley, of cleared field and native forest, of farm and pasture? I remember especially how lovely it seemed to me this spring, and look at it now."

They were on top of a high hill, and Mr. Robertson, looking around on all sides, said, "Yes, I have thought often of its beauty, but I had a notion that possibly I was biased in its favor because I loved it so."

"And yet I have heard that you think of leaving it."

"Yes, I have a good offer to go to the City as cotton buyer for the firm of Green & Porter, and I have been considering it."

"Will, do you know that you are the best loved man in this community—best loved by both white and black?"

"No, I would say you are that, Brother Maxcy."

"No, I am a stranger, an interloper, and at best I can not stay here longer than two years more, and then I am a preacher. But you are one of them, flesh of their flesh, bone of their bone. And a man can not lightly cast aside such a treasure of human love. It entails an obligation."

"But, Brother Maxcy, I—I think you overestimate

what they feel for me, and—and I owe an obligation to —Mamie and Bob, and—and, yes, to myself."

"Let's look at it, Will. The most that you are likely to accomplish in the City is to become a member of the firm, which will be more or less a sinking of your identity. Your individuality will in a measure be lost. You don't care enough for money, thank God, ever to become largely rich, and you will merely be one of many, all pretty much alike and all tending to become more and more alike as the years go by."

"Well, there may be something in that."

"Yes, there's a great deal in that. In the City your light will be hid under a bushel and it will become dimmer and dimmer; here it will be on a hill-top, and it may become brighter and brighter."

"Thank you for that, Brother Maxcy, but what about Bob? Here with all of these nigger girls and women about, he is constantly subject to a temptation that may result in his becoming another Mr. Hiram or even a Randy Shallow."

"No, no, he can't escape temptations of that kind by going to the City. Temptations here and there must be faced and overcome. And then shall we leave this country that you say you love, to the Randy Shallows?"

"But then, Brother Maxcy, I haven't made any money here for five years, and the farming grows less and less profitable every year."

"I have thought of that. I have seen it. I have looked about, and almost the only people who have made any money have made it from cattle. Prices are low now, but such is the best time to get into that business. I hear that John Ramsey is going to leave you at the

end of this year, anyway. Why wouldn't it be a good idea for you to transfer Sim Senter to your home place and Joe Williams to the lower place? Farm for a while on the lower place as you have been doing, and make a cattle ranch of the home place. Get good stock. Sim Senter and his boys could raise a feed crop, and you and they could manage the cattle. And Bob likes cattle. Let him go on to college, and if, when he comes back, he wants to stay here, perhaps you will have a business that he will be proud to stay with. If not, why, then let him make his own choice. Had you ever thought, Will, what a great service it would be to show the people here a way to economic freedom? And they are your people, they love you."

"Oh, I don't know, Brother Maxcy. It would take a lot of money to make the change, to buy the cattle and so on."

"But you could raise that money, couldn't you, Will?"

"Oh, I suppose I could raise it, but money is mighty hard to raise now, and I'd have to mortgage something I had intended never to mortgage."

"And then, Will, look at it from the side of morals and religion."

"It seems almost hopeless from that side."

"No, no, by no means. Of course you know and I know that neither you nor I nor any other man or woman will make it perfect. But any of us can make it better. We can help some. And you more than any other man here. Improvement is bound to be a growth, and though my metaphor is mixed, it is spread from the contagion of example. Dr. Anderson, you know, is a good enough physician for any city, but he stays here

because he likes the freedom of the country and because he likes to hunt and fish. Can you not stay here because you love the place and the people, and because the people love you? Oh, Will, I swear to you that the greatest satisfaction you will ever get in this life will come from that love. And I implore you not to throw it away."

Brother Maxcy paused to wipe his eyes, and then continued, "I know I am intruding into your private affairs, but—but I know you know I wouldn't do it if I didn't love you. And then we are likely to have more trouble than ever here. The Ku Klux Klan is setting about the organization of a branch here. They actually approached me yesterday, and what do you suppose? They told me that the Baptist minister had agreed to join! I don't understand that unless it is because the organization is opposed to the Catholics, as well as to the Jews and the niggers. But however that may be, it is certain to stir up bitterer feeling among our people and lead to new outrages of many kinds. And we can't spare you, Will. We need your counsel and example. Don't answer me. Don't say anything now. Think the question over."—In a changed voice he said, "Here we are at Sim Senter's, anyway."

Sim met them at the door, "Howdy, Mr. Will! Howdy, Mr. Maxcy!" There was a look of interrogation in his eye.

"Sim," said Mr. Robertson, "we have brought her something. Would she like to see us, do you think?"

"I don't know," said Sim, trying to swallow his tears, "maybe, maybe you, Mr. Will, but—but—"

"Hardly me," said Brother Maxcy. "I know, I under-

stand, I'm a stranger to her. I—I—I'm the representative of my God, and—and I'm a stranger to all of you here."

"Well, Parson," began Sim apologetically, "you know, we never have been much in the way of church-goers, and—and—"

"Oh, don't apologize to me," said Brother Maxcy, "it's my fault, I—I could go down on my knees to beg your forgiveness. I—I—have never come near you—"

"Maybe you better go in, Sim, and ask her," said Mr. Robertson.

"Naw, Mr. Will, you come on and let Mr. Maxcy set hyeer on the po'ch, and maybe, later—"

"All right," said Mr. Robertson, "lead the way, Sim."

When they came to the room where Susie was, Sim said, "Hyeer's Mr. Will, honey, come to see you. He says he hyeard you wuz sick an' he come to bring you somethin'."

"Oh, Bob, Bob's not hyeer, not Bob," cried Susie, covering her face with her hands and turning to the wall.

"No, honey, Bob's not hyeer."

"And Miss Mamie, not, not Miss Mamie?"

"No, honey, they ain't nobody, but jes' Mr. Will."

"I—I came to bring you a little present, Susie," said Mr. Robertson.

"Thank—thank you, Mr. Will," she said without uncovering her face.

"Don't you want to know what it is, Susie? It is a nice present."

"What is it, Mr. Will?"

"It is a whole hundred dollars, so you can take a nice trip somewhere as soon as you get better."

"A whole hundred dollars for me, for me!" she exclaimed, taking her hands from her face and raising her head. But only for a moment was there joy on her countenance. Listlessly her head dropped back and her hands fell on the cover, "No, Mr. Will, 'tain't no use," she said.

"But look at it, Susie. See, it is a great big roll of bills. There, I'm putting it in your hand. Feel it. All that money is for you. And you can go to the City, anywhere you want to go, and get well and strong again. There, take it, close your hand on it."

"Th-thank you, Mr. Will, but 'taint no use. Can't nuthin' do me no good now, Mr. Will, an'—an' I've done cried myself out, Mr. Will. I—I can't cry no mo'. An' you're cryin', Mr. Will, an' I can't cry no mo'. Ain't it funny? It looks like I'm the one that ought to be cryin'."

"But, honey, you can take this, and we'll add a lot more to it, and you can go far, far way, and stay till, till you get well, till you want to come back."

"No, I don't want to go anywhere."

"Not to the City? Miss Mamie will go to the City with you and you can go to shows and everything and have some pretty new clothes and everything."

"No, no, Mr. Will, I—I couldn't a-bear that. I couldn't a-bear for Miss Mamie to see me. I jes' want to stay hyeer with Mama and Papa and the chillun. You won't mind, Mr. Will, if I jes' stay hyeer, will you?"

"No, honey, I won't mind, but—"

"S'pose I wuz to go somewhere, and Bob wuz to see me, s'pose them town women wuz to see me, I—I'd die, Mr. Will."

"No, no, they'd love you, Susie, they'd be kind to you, they'd love you—"

"Ai-ee! ai-ee!" screamed Susie. "Oh, Harry. Oh, Papa!"

"Catch her arm there quick, Mr. Will," said Sim, as he grasped her other arm. "She tries to fling herself out of the bed. She's been havin' these spells ever since she came to, Friday evenin', but she didn't have none last night and to-day till now."

Mrs. Senter came into the room. "What air we goin' to do, Mr. Will? What air we goin' to do?" she entreated.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know. But she must have no more company. She must not be excited. I'll take the children to my house and keep them for you. Let Harry hitch up the wagon this evening and bring 'em over. You and Sim must be spared to watch in here. Is there any white woman we can get to cook for you? I would send Cindy, but Susie might not by any possibility want to see a black face."

"Waal, I don't know, suh, maybe—"

"Get some fresh water now and sponge Susie's face with it; keep on, till she comes to. I want to speak to Brother Maxcy."

Out on the porch he said, "Brother Maxcy, what white woman do you think we could get to stay here a while and relieve Mrs. Senter?"

"I know one and a mighty good one," answered Brother Maxcy.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Maxcy."

"Oh, this would be so hard and unpleasant for her."

"Well, sometimes she is hard on me and on sinners,"

said Brother Maxcy, "but I've never yet heard of her turning her back on people in distress."

"It would be lovely if she could come."

"She will be here this afternoon; I'll bring her."

"Well, Harry is to bring the children over to us, and I must caution you. Sister Maxcy mustn't go into Susie's room. Susie can't bear to see any strangers."

"I'll tell her. She will understand that," said Brother Maxcy. "But how is Susie? I heard her screaming."

"I think it will be a miracle if she gets well and keeps her mind," answered Mr. Robertson. And then he added with a profound sigh, "After all, it might be better for her never to get well."

For some time on the way home Brother Maxcy and Mr. Robertson had little to say. Each was busy with his own thoughts, Brother Maxcy's mind being occupied mainly with formulating such a statement of the Senters' situation to his wife that she would readily understand the necessity of coming to their relief, and Mr. Robertson was pondering the events of the past week and his own connection therewith, and wondering whether he could have guarded against them. But now and then his thought would glance toward the future with vague speculaton as to the outcome of it all.

Brother Maxcy's mind must have wandered somewhat, too, for he interrupted a long silence to say, "Will, in what I said about the Ku Klux I did not mean to convey the idea that I thought it was a thing that would last very long or that it was a matter of great importance. It is unreasonable to believe that our people will not soon recognize the misguided folly of trying to improve folks morally by unlawful deeds of violence."

"Yes, I understood," answered Mr. Robertson. "I

think also that it is a temporary complication that will soon pass. Or it may be that it will come out in the open at last, and really act as a helpful influence in the enforcement of the law and the determination of the right relations between the races. I think it would be a fine idea to have a non-partizan, non-sectarian organization of men who are really interested in the enforcement of the law through the regularly elected officers and in the promotion of racial purity and the uplift of both races. But membership in the organization should not be secret or exclusive. And it should encourage its members to study the race question, and should award substantial prizes for the best suggestions looking toward its solution. It seems to me that a world of good might be accomplished in such a way. The main trouble with us all now, I think, is that we don't know what to do. And it is characteristic of ignorance, whenever it acts, to flare into violence."

"Spoken like a statesman and a Christian!" exclaimed Brother Maxcy. "I would be one of the first to join such an organization."

"I, too, should like to be a member," said Mr. Robertson. "But, oh, dear me, poor little Susie!"

"Yes, indeed," said Brother Maxcy, "her case is such a frightfully concrete thing."

"It is too horrible to think of," said Mr. Robertson, "and yet we can not get it out of our minds, and we feel that we ought not to get it out. We ought to go on thinking about it until we find some way to prevent such things."

The preacher in Brother Maxcy spoke, "The grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient remedy."

"I say it respectfully, reverently," answered Mr. Robertson, "but this has happened in spite of your remedy."

"Oh, we are all so weak and frail and futile, dull of understanding and hard of heart, why can we not, why will we not, accept the teachings of our Saviour?"

"That is bigger than the race question," said Mr. Robertson, "and you know as much about it as I do, or perhaps far more."

"Yes, pardon me," said Brother Maxcy, "I realize that it sounds like the merest cant."

"No, no, I didn't mean that, Brother Maxcy, but time and again I go over in my mind this question, What if Susie's assailant had been white? What then?—The answer is, so far as I can unravel it, that he, too, would probably have been lynched, but not so certainly, and at any rate not with such violence of fury. And then I think further, that if it were discovered here that a nigger was living with a white woman with her consent, he would probably be lynched, almost certainly would be, while a white man may live openly with a nigger woman under the penalty only of moral reprobation and a certain degree of social ostracism. What we seem most bent on doing is the preventing of racial contamination through our women. And that we will prevent at all hazards. And I confess that it goes mightily against my grain to stand up for the orderly processes of the law in such cases."

"Let's be honest about the thing, and go further," said Brother Maxcy; "if a white man should outrage a nigger woman, he almost certainly would not be lynched. He would certainly not, or in all probability not, be lynched by white men. And if niggers should attempt to lynch

him, he would almost as certainly be defended by other white men."

"Yes, that's so," said Mr. Robertson, "one reason being that few would believe an outrage had really been committed, and another being that we can not have niggers lynching white men. That we can not permit. We feel that white supremacy must be maintained, or that we shall all be engulfed in a sea of black. But I suppose it is as in nearly everything else; we make a concession to the passions of the dominant men. Yet I declare to you that personally I would not have put myself out so much to save from the fury of a mob a white assailant of Susie Senter as I did to save from it Ulysses Mulberry. But perhaps it is because I feel that we have a right to expect better self-control from a white man than from a nigger, and of course I felt sure that the law would adequately punish Ulysses if he were really guilty. There might be one chance in a thousand for a white man to escape just punishment for such a crime against a white woman, but practically none for a nigger."

"But did you ever hear, Will, of a nigger man lynched or executed for the rape of a nigger woman?"

"No, I never did. I think I'll ask Judge Mowry some time if there have been such cases.—But I was just thinking. You know, three or four years ago, we were protesting mightily against the migration of the niggers to the North. Well, that may have been the best thing. The solution of the question may lie in scattering them all over the country instead of having them congested in one section."

"Well, after all," said Brother Maxcy, "the revival of the Ku Klux Klan is in the main a protest against the amalgamation of the races. We can't keep from

sympathizing with that aim, although we look with horror and detestation upon the outrages perpetrated by them in trying to carry it out."

"Yes, and all the more so," said Mr. Robertson, "because we know that such methods are bound to result in the spread of anarchy in every direction. If unchecked, they will make of our America, the land of the free, in reality a land of hidden tyranny and secret assassination. Surely, surely, our people can not fall to that, either through impatience with the law's administration, race antagonism, or religious bigotry—or through all three combined! Surely we have advanced beyond that. Did it ever occur to you, Brother Maxcy, that maybe the church hasn't done its part? That somehow we have had a right to expect more of it than we have received?"

"Oh, Will, I have prayed and wept over that. Oh, my God, the church is afraid. It cowers trembling before the power of Mammon, but it is not dead. Oh, thank God, it is not dead! It will arise, it will gird itself for the contest. It will cleanse itself, so that it may indeed and in truth look up to God, not through violence, not through a mist of blood, but through the clear ether of love and self-sacrifice!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next day Mr. Robertson was surprised when he went to town to find Henry Thompson sitting in the front door of his store, he was so rarely there. And still more was he surprised when Henry said, "Will, would you mind coming to the back of the store? I want to have a little talk with you."

When they were seated behind the bookkeeper's standing-desk, Henry began, "Will, you know about Mirandy. Everybody does. I've been living with her. We have got children."

"Yes," said Mr. Robertson.

"I've heard that the Ku Klux Klan is coming here. And I'm skeered. In a way I'm skeered. What do you think about it?"

"Well, Henry, I—I hardly know. It is a delicate matter."

"Yes, it is delicate, all right, I reckon, but spit it out, Will. I can stand it. You know I don't say much. I never was much of a hand to talk, but I've listened a lot."

"Well, Henry, I think you ought to stop living with Mirandy."

"Oh, for that matter you think I ought never to have begun."

"Yes, I think you ought never to have begun."

"But I did begin, it is not necessary to talk about why, and I have kept on. Everybody, I know, looks on me as a low down dog. And I reckon I am. But

wouldn't I be worse than that to cut loose from Mirandy and turn her adrift now?"

"You could put her and the children on a farm somewhere, and help them along until they could take care of themselves."

"And then everybody would say that I got skeered of the Ku Klux and ducked for cover."

"Well, it wouldn't make so much difference what everybody said, would it?"

"You mean they've said a plenty about me already and I've stood it, knowing that I was wrong?"

"Henry, I don't want to—"

"You don't want to hurt my feelings, you don't want to act as a judge over me. I know that, but I'm asking you. I'm bringing it on myself. Don't, don't push me off, Will. It is all I can do to hold my courage up to —to ask you. You don't know how hard this is for me. I—I am a timid man, I've always been, oh, I don't know—" Henry wiped the tears from his cheek with his bent forefinger and flipped the moisture to the floor.

"Henry, don't you think you could settle Mirandy and the children on a farm, as I suggested?"

"No, no, Will, I couldn't. I've got to confess it. I—I—I couldn't git along without Mirandy. I know what you think I am, but—but I couldn't."

"Well, then," said Mr. Robertson coldly, "the only thing I see you can do, is to move to some other country or to some other part of this one where intermarriages are not forbidden, and there marry Mirandy. I don't advise that, but I don't know what else you can do."

"No, Will, I don't know anything about them other countries or them other people, and it's too late for me to git used to 'em. I want to stay here."

"Well, if your mind is made up to stay here and to keep on living with Mirandy, I don't see why you wanted to ask me about it," said Mr. Robertson.

"But, Will, don't you see? I—I jus' had to—to tell somebody—all these years, and I—I couldn't say a word, it looks like—"

"And now you want to talk to me because you are scared?"

"No, no, Will, it's not altogether that. I—I've been thinking—believe me, it's not altogether that. I—I've been thinking a long time that—that I ought to do something. I jus' haven't known what was—was right to do."

"I've told you what I think is right for you to do," said Mr. Robertson, "and I don't know anything else to tell you."

"But, I can't do that, Will. Mirandy, if she is black, has got some feelings, too. And—and she has been faithful to me, and I owe her something."

"Well, take her up North and marry her, then."

"But she don't want to go. She wants to stay here."

"I don't see how I can help you, Henry."

"No, I don't reckon you can. I reckon I was wanting sympathy. I reckon I couldn't stand it no longer without talking to somebody. Well, I've talked. And I haven't got nothing. I don't deserve nothing, I reckon. That's all right. If you can't do nothing for me, ain't nobody else can. I don't hold it against you, Will. I see I'll have to take keer of myself the best way I can. But if anybody comes pestering around me, Ku Klux or anybody else, somebody is going to git hurt. Bear that in mind, Will, somebody's going to git hurt."

"Yes, I believe that, Henry. I hope nobody will bother

you. Will you let me say that I—I think you have—have trouble enough as it is?"

"Great God! Will, if only I never had—and—and I kinder drifted into—and—and I never could git over it—north, south, anywhere. There ain't no use, it will stay with me always, follow me anywhere. And the hell of it is that if I hadn't done it so openly—"

"There, there, Henry, I'm sorry, but—"

Randy Shallow's voice was heard from the front of the store, "Mr. Hiram, is Henry here? I want to see him about them cattle."

"Yes, I think he is back there, talking to Mr. Will Robertson," answered Mr. Hiram.

Randy came back. When he saw Henry and Mr. Robertson in such close conference, he said, "Well, Mr. Will, I didn't know your credit was gittin' in such bad shape as that," and laughed.

"Will's credit is better than yours'll ever be, Randy," said Henry angrily.

"But what are you all broke up about, Henry?" countered Randy. "I don't smell no Ku Klux around here, ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut your damn mouth!" exclaimed Henry.

"Did you want to see me?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"No, I wanted to see Henry about them cattle he was talkin' about buyin' from me."

"I don't want none of your cattle," answered Henry, "now or no other time."

"Hunh, I must ha' put my foot in it," said Randy. "I didn't know you was skeered of the Ku Klux sho' 'nuff, ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, are you going, or ain't you?" asked Henry threateningly.

"Oh, I'm a-goin', all right," answered Randy with a grin, "but I'll probably see you again before long."

Henry looked at him, but said nothing. He sauntered out of the store whistling between his teeth.

"And to think," said Henry, turning to Mr. Robertson, "he's a damn sight more respectable than I am, and everybody knows he's got nigger chillun scattered all over these hills around here. But acknowledge 'em and take keer of 'em?—No, he don't do that. If he was to do that, he wouldn't be respectable at all."

"Well, you know, Henry, Shakespeare said, 'Assume a virtue, if you have it not.'"

"And that's about as far as most of 'em in these parts ever git," replied Henry. "If you was to strip off all of the assumin' that's done around here, wouldn't you have a pretty kittle of fish?"

"Well, I imagine the same thing is true pretty much everywhere else," said Mr. Robertson. "If we all knew the whole truth about everybody, and everybody knew the whole truth about us, it might be too disheartening. And there is a sort of agreement that we will respect the other feller's pretenses, if he will respect ours."

"And that respecting is what makes respectability," said Henry.

"As distinguished from genuine goodness, yes—but there are genuinely good people, Henry."

"Yes, I reckon so," answered Henry, "anyhow we'll let that pass. Anyway, I'm much obliged to you, Will. Somehow I feel better. I reckon it helps a feller to talk a thing out sometimes."

"Yes, it does," said Mr. Robertson, "but I'll have to be going. I wanted to see Dr. Anderson this morning. I hope you won't have any trouble, Henry."

"I'll take keer of myself, thank you, Will.—But, by the way, how do you feel about buying that little place of mine over there by Uncle Peter's and the nigger church that Mr. Hiram spoke to you about? You needn't pay any cash at all. I'll take your note for the whole thing, three or five years, what do you say?"

"Oh, I hardly know," said Mr. Robertson. "It's a good trade all right. I'll think about it.' '

On his way to the doctor's office Mr. Robertson met Bob in front of the drug store. He asked, "Bob, have you seen Mr. Deane this morning?"

"No, Papa."

"Well, when I first came to town, I saw him, and he told me that Mrs. Deane was getting up a forty-two party for the young folks to-morrow night, and he asked me to tell you to be sure to come."

"No, Papa, I don't think they like me around there any more."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, I just don't think they do," said Bob, confusedly.

"Well, you are wrong about that, because when I asked Mr. Deane what girl you should bring, he kinder laughed and said none, that they had a girl for you there."

"Oh, did he?" asked Bob with some eagerness.

"He certainly did, and I can't conceive of any reason why they shouldn't want you, or why you think they don't."

"No, but I thought Mrs. Deane acted like she was mad at me last Sunday. I was talking to Minnie, and Mrs. Deane came and jerked her away like I was poison."

"Oh, that's all foolishness," said Mr. Robertson, "she was just in a hurry to get home. And I hear that she

and Mr. Deane didn't like the sermon much. Among other things they thought Brother Maxcy ought to have let each of us decide for ourselves whether we were fit to take the Sacrament or not."

"I'm glad he didn't," said Bob without thinking.

"Why?" asked Mr. Robertson suspiciously.

"Well—well," answered Bob, "I don't know, but I sorter think we wouldn't have felt right about taking it, and yet we would have hated to make ourselves conspicuous by not taking it."

"I'm glad to know you've done some thinking about it," said Mr. Robertson, "but you will go to the party?"

"Yes, Papa, I'll go," said Bob, turning away.

As his father walked toward Dr. Anderson's office, Bob said to himself, "Gee! I had to come mighty close to straight out lying. I've got to be more careful."

And his father was thinking, "Somehow there is a change in Bob here lately, and it is not a change for the better"

CHAPTER XXVII

At the party Thursday night, when all had been assigned to their respective tables for the domino game of forty-two, Bob said to Minnie, who was his partner, "I don't see Jasper, junior, here to-night. Where is he?"

"Oh, he went off this evening to hunt cattle with Jerry, our married brother, and he hasn't come back yet. I told him not to go, that he would be late, but he said he had to go, and not to wait for him if he didn't get back in time."

"Looks like he could have waited until to-morrow," said Bob.

"Yes, that's what I thought," said Minnie, "but nothing would do him except to go."

Bob began to shuffle the dominoes. Minnie joined in so that her hand touched Bob's, and she looked at him shyly, letting him know that the touch was not accidental. Her eyes seemed to say, "See, I think you are worthy to touch me."

Bob lifted his hand and laid it on hers. "Hunh! look here, everybody," called Tom Parker, one of their opponents in the game. "Bob and Minnie are playing hands till we can't get a chance to play forty-two. Ha! ha! ha!"

"We're not," declared Minnie, blushing furiously.

Bob stammered, "I—I—I—"

All of the young people laughed uproariously, so that Bob and Minnie had an uncomfortable five minutes.

At last Bob managed to say, "Come on, let's play the game."

Tom, taking mercy on him, said, "All right," and the game began.

The old folks regarded forty-two as proper, because it was played with dominoes instead of cards, and the young people liked it because it was really a card game, though played with dominoes. Some facetious person of the community called it Methodist poker, since it was commonly regarded as allowable for even preachers to play it.

Mrs. Deane walked about from table to table, offering suggestions to the less experienced players. And Mr. Deane sat out on the front porch waiting for the refreshments, which were to consist of ice cream, cakes, and fruit punch. As the first game was finished, and the players were in the act of progressing from one table to another, Mrs. Deane's negro cook came rushing in, her eyes almost bursting from their sockets, "Lawd, Miss Miriam!" she cried, "de Ku Kluxes is hyeer! Dey marchin' thoo de town. My boy, Billy, done tol' me. Whut's we gwine to do?"

Mr. Deane hurried in from the porch, "What's that, Nancy? What's all that foolishness?"

"Lawd, Mr. Jasper, de Ku Kluxes is a-marchin' thoo de town right now. Hide me, hide me, white folks, hide me!"

"Shut up!" said Mr. Deane, "go back to the kitchen. The Ku Klux are not going to hurt you."

"Naw, suh, naw, suh, Mr. Jasper, please lem' me stay in hyeer. Uh—uh—uh, Mr. Jasper—"

"Well, stay in here then, I'm going to see about this."

"Let's all go see," said one of the boys. And before

Mrs. Deane could recover, to make effective objection, the whole party rushed into the street, and headed for the public square, laughing, but with a feeling of something like mysterious fear beneath the laughter.

They found Nancy's report to be true. Straight through the town was marching a long line of men, in single file, and swathed in white from head to toe. In the lead was a rider on horseback, bearing a flaming cross. Behind him walked a white-robed pedestrian carrying an American flag, and then came the others afoot, some with torches that illuminated placards borne by their companions. The placards read, "America 100% American," "Boot-Leggers Hunt Your Holes," "Hypocrites Beware," "The White Man On Top Forever," "We Want No Mulatto Babies," "Niggers Mind Your Step."

Silently the procession wound its length along, and silently the spectators watched in an open-mouthed hush. When the last of the spectral marchers had disappeared, the weird stillness was broken by a babble of whispering voices. "Who were they?"—"Where did they come from?"—"I recognized that high feller with the stoop."—"Did you read those placards?"—"Well, I never!"—"What do you reckon they are going to do?"—"Some folks had better look out."—"How did all these people get together so quick?"

Indeed, it did seem that all of the inhabitants of the town were gathered as spectators, but it was a greater wonder still how there could be so many of the Ku Klux, variously estimated from one to five hundred by the amazed on-lookers.

"Fools!" said Mr. Deane, "they'll git the niggers all stirred up and restless, so's they'll work even less than

usual. Well, I'm glad that I have raised my boys with too much sense to fall in with anything like that."

As the young people went back to the Deane home, they were agitated by many different feelings. Tom Parker was thinking, "I wonder if I couldn't get into that gang, even if my pa is sheriff. I don't see why I couldn't get in as well as some of the other fellers."

One of the girls, blushing and giggling, whispered to Minnie, "Did you see that placard, 'We Want No Mulatto Babies'?"

"Yes," said Minnie, "wasn't it awful? They ought not to allow such things. They ought to be ashamed."

"That's what they say," whispered the other girl, giggling even more immoderately, "they're not going to allow 'em."

"Smarty!" said Minnie, "hush up. They'll be asking us what we are giggling at."

"Anh—anh—anh, what are you girls giggling at?" jeered little Willie Deane.

"Nothing," answered Minnie.

"Oh, but I know," said Willie.

"Shucks! you don't know anything," answered the girl.

"Never mind," retorted Willie, "I know what I know, all right—yanh—yanh—yanh!"

Much to his dismay, Bob found himself in the returning throng side by side with Mr. Deane, who asked, "Well, Bob, what did you think of it?"

"I don't know, sir," said Bob.

"Well, I think they are all powerful big fools. How would you like to be one of 'em, hey?"

"I wouldn't like to be," said Bob.

"Some of you young fellers around here had better mind your step, hey?"

"Yes, sir, I expect they had."

"Well, I don't want you or any of my boys to go play the fool and join in with that gang."

"No, sir, we are not going to," answered Bob, and deftly managed to get some of the others between him and Mr. Deane, and to rejoin Minnie.

"Wasn't it awful, Bob?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Bob, "it wasn't much to get excited about."

"It wasn't! Why, I'm just trembling all over."

"Just some ordinary fellers around here with sheets on 'em," said Bob.

"But what do you reckon they are going to do?"

"Scare some niggers, I reckon."

"Well, there are some white folks that will be scared, too, I expect."

"Shucks!" said Bob, "I'd like to know who'd be scared of that gang."

Jared Peters overheard Bob's last remark, and said mockingly, "Oh, Bob's so brave, ain't he? He ain't skeered of nothing."

"Well, are you scared, Jared?" asked Bob. "If you are, stand out there and let me hear your teeth chatter."

"Hunh! I know somebody whose teeth better be chattering," retorted Jared.

"Who is that?" demanded Bob hardily.

"Well, never mind, them fellers mean business. They ain't goin' to stand any foolishness."

"How do you know so much about 'em?"

"Well, never mind, I know all about 'em."

"Maybe Jared has been listening somewhere," said Minnie, and after a slight pause added, "as usual."

"Well, if you'd listen around, maybe you'd learn something, too," answered Jared, and snickered.

"There's one funny thing," said Minnie, "I didn't see Mr. Tony Peters in the crowd of on-lookers, did you, Bob?"

"No, I didn't see him anywhere," answered Bob.

"Oh, he was out of town to-night," declared Jared, moving away.

"You know, I believe we've got one of 'em spotted," said Minnie.

"Yes," said Bob, "and I'd like to know who would be scared of Mr. Tony Peters except some nigger that owes him money."

Then they reached the house. On their coming into the light, the chatter became louder and more general. All joined in giving Mrs. Deane a glowing, but confused, account of the spectacle. Into the midst of the babble came Jasper, junior, dressed in his every day clothes. "What's all the row about?" he asked.

They vied with each other in going over again the details of the exhibition and in describing their feelings, most of the girls representing themselves as being all tremors and excitement, and most of the boys affecting indifference and condescension. Jasper, junior, listened with an expression of sly amusement, and egged the others on.

"But my! Jasper, junior, it took you and Jerry a long time to attend to those cattle," finally said Mrs. Deane. "You'd better go and put on your Sunday clothes."

"Well, we had to hunt a long time before we found 'em," said Jasper, junior, "and it was just our luck to

miss seeing the Ku Klux," but he smiled quizzically and gesticulated with his left hand. Then he added, "I don't see much use of dressing up now, it must be almost ten o'clock."

"Why, so it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Deane. "I'll serve the refreshments and we can talk. And if they want to play a game or two afterwards, it will be all right."

"Minnie, how did Jasper, junior, lose his little finger? It seems funny, but I never did hear," said Bob.

"Well, we had a rooster that crowed too much to suit Jasper, junior, so one day he slipped up and caught the rooster and was going to cut its head off with a hatchet. He was holding it down on a block, and some way the rooster twisted or something, and Jasper, junior, cut off his own little finger, and let the rooster go. But next day he shot it with a pistol."

While the refreshments were being eaten, Mrs. Deane stood by Bob's table, and took occasion to say, "Well, Bob, I haven't had a chance to talk to you to-night. But what did you think about the Ku Klux?"

"Well, I think they are a bad thing," said Bob.

"Oh, do you," asked Mrs. Deane, "and why?"

"Well, Papa says they are bound to cause trouble and hard feeling and probably bloodshed."

"So that's what your Papa thinks, but I was wondering how you feel about 'em."

"Oh, I don't expect to have anything to do with 'em," said Bob.

"From what I read in the papers," she answered, "it looks like they kinder push themselves on people sometimes, though."

Tom Parker, at an adjoining table, laughed, "They sure do, Mrs. Deane, but if they push themselves on me,

they've got to do some fast pushing. I'd get up and hump."

"Well, I reckon I'd do about the same thing," said Bob, blushing, but grateful to Tom for the intervention.

"But they tell me that they never get after anybody that's been good," said Mrs. Deane.

"Well, they'll be certain to let Bob and me alone, ha! ha! ha!" said Tom.

"Tom, I think you'd like to join 'em," said Mrs. Deane with exasperation in her tone.

"Sure thing," said Tom, "I'd join 'em in a minute, if they'd let me."

"And what about you, Bob?"

"No'm, I don't think Papa would like it, and—"

"When it ain't Mama with Bob, it's Papa," said Tom teasingly.

"Well, it would be better if you were the same way, Tom," said Mrs. Deane with a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes.

Later she said to Mr. Deane, "Jasper, I don't know, Bob may be a pretty good boy, after all."

"I always told you he was good enough, but not much of a worker," snorted Mr. Deane.

On the way home that night Bob's first thought was, "Outside of Minnie, the Deanes are certainly disagreeable people. They seem to think I belong to 'em, and they keep on poking questions at me till I don't have any rest."

And then he thought, "Suppose the Ku Klux were to get after a feller, sho' 'nuff! But, shucks! they ain't going to do anything."

Still his mind kept running on the same idea, and the night was dark and lonesome. When he came to the

creek bottom with its dank woods on each side of the road, he urged Saladin to a gallop. And it was not until he had climbed the hill and turned in at the big gate, that his tension relaxed into a feeling of relief. As he rode slowly along the avenue of pecan trees, drowsiness overtook him. "Gee! I'm sleepy," he muttered. But in the midst of a yawn he suddenly became aware of the approach of a horseman. His mouth snapped to automatically, and cold chills ran along his spine.

"Is that you, Bob?" asked a voice.

"Y-y-yes," stammered Bob.

"Did you see the Ku Klux?"

"Y-y-yes, sir."

"Ha! ha! ha!" came a laugh that Bob recognized as Dr. Anderson's.

"Oh, shucks! Dr. Anderson, you, you—" But another alarming idea occurred to him, "Is anybody at our house sick?"

"No, but don't ever tell me, Bob, that you are not scared of the Ku Klux."

"Well, I—I wasn't thinking about meeting anybody," said Bob.

"No," said Dr. Anderson, becoming serious, "but Susie Senter is much worse, and I've been by to tell your father about it. I expect you'd better go in to see him before you put your horse up."

"Is she much worse?" asked Bob.

"Yes, she's a whole lot worse," answered Dr. Anderson, "I don't think she will ever get well. It's a pitiful thing. But good night, Bob."

"Good night, doctor."

When Bob came into the sitting-room, his father said, "Dr. Anderson has been here, and has told me that Susie

Senter will hardly live beyond to-morrow or next day. I've been thinking about it, and I believe the only thing to do, is to warn the sheriff to take Madison Mulberry out of our jail to another county, probably to the City would be best. Have you put up Saladin?"

"No, sir, Dr. Anderson told me I had better see you first. I met him in the avenue."

"Well, I think I ought to ride over to-night and wake up the sheriff. It might not be necessary, but if Susie dies and Madison is here, there is no telling what might happen."

"Did Dr. Anderson tell you about the Ku Klux?" asked Bob.

"Yes, he told me they marched through the town."

"Papa, if you are going over there to-night, let me go with you."

"You are not afraid the Ku Klux will get me, are you?" asked Mr. Robertson, smiling.

"No, not exactly," said Bob, "but if you don't mind, I'd rather go with you."

"Well, thank you, son, we'll go and saddle my horse."

"Let me get our guns," said Bob, "they are downstairs here in the closet under the stairway."

"Oh, all right, if they'd make you feel better, but we won't need 'em. And I reckon—no, I'd better go up and tell your mother. I know she hasn't gone to sleep, with you out. She went up more than an hour ago to put the Senter children to bed, and I suppose she decided to undress and lie down. All those children keep her pretty busy during the day."

"I'll go saddle the horse while you tell her," said Bob.

When it was explained to Mrs. Robertson that there was no danger, that they were merely going to tell the

sheriff to remove Madison, in order to prevent the probability of another lynching, she gave a reluctant consent to their going, but Mr. Robertson didn't say anything to her about the Ku Klux.

When they reached the sheriff's house and waked him, he came out half dressed and sleepy. Mr. Robertson explained their errand to him.

"Shucks! Will, I ought to have told you, I reckon," he said, "but I got tipped off that the Ku Klux were going to march to-night, and I took Madison to the City last night without saying anything about it to anybody except my deputy who went with me. I thought it was best to be on the safe side."

"Good boy, Rod!" said Mr. Robertson. "I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"Oh, that's all right, Will, but it's a pity you had to come way over here this time of night."

"Well, Dr. Anderson has just told me that Susie Senter will probably not last beyond to-morrow or next day."

"Phew! I'm glad I've got Madison out of the way," said the sheriff. "Oh, but it's a hell of a thing for that poor little girl to have to die. Damn those infernal niggers!"

"Yes, Sister Maxcy and Dr. Anderson did all they could, and Brother Maxcy has been there most of the time, helping around on the outside. But didn't anything do any good."

"Sister Maxcy is really a good woman in spite of her sharp tongue, ain't she, Will?"

"She is that!" answered Mr. Robertson. "But good night, Rod."

"Good night, Will,—and Bob, I hadn't hardly noticed you, you're gettin' to be a regular man now, ain't you?—But good night, both of you."

"Good night, Mr. Rodney," answered Bob, his breast swelling with pride at the compliment. It was something worth while to be told by the sheriff that you were getting to be a regular man.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EARLY Saturday morning Sim Senter came by the old Benton place. Mr. Robertson hurried out to meet him, and asked, "How is she this morning, Sim?"

"She died last night, Mr. Will, and I'm on my way to git the coffin now. I thought I'd come by and tell you," his lips twitched, and tears ran down his cheeks.

"Do you want me to go with you, Sim?"

"Well, I thought maybe if you and Miss Mamie could come and help me to pick out the coffin—and, and, we didn't have nuthin' fittin' to bury her in, and my wife has got to have somethin' to wear to the funeral."

"Don't worry about that, Sim. Sister Maxcy sent us word by Brother Maxcy, and Mamie and some of the other ladies spent yesterday in getting and making the things for Susie and for Mrs. Senter, too. They are in the house now."

"Thank you, thank you kindly, Mr. Will. I know we never kin pay back all the folks have done for us. They have been so good. Ever'body has. All the people out our way has been wantin' to set up with us, an' do ever'-thing they could. But couldn't nobody do no good." He broke down and wept.

"There, there, Sim, that's all right. I'll go with you and help you select the coffin."

"It would be all right, don't you think, Mr. Will, for me to use that money you and Brother Maxcy brought out there?"

"Of course it would, that's the way the people would

want you to use it. If it's not enough, we'll make up what's lacking."

"No, no, it will be enough, but I reckon I ought to tell you Harry used some of it."

"What did he use it for?"

"Waal, he wanted to join the Ku Klux, and he didn't have no money, and it took ten dollars to join an' six dollars for the robes an' things, so he used sixteen dollars. I don't know if I ought to say anything about it, but I reckon I ought to, too."

"My God! what did he want to join the Ku Klux for?"

"Waal, he said he thought he owed it to Susie."

"Owed it to Susie!"

"Yas, and then he don't like it much about that Richard Sanders harborin' that nigger that night. He says they've took Madison off, but Richard is hyeer yit."

"But great God! Sim, didn't I tell you that Richard was merely keeping him to hand him over to the officers?"

"Yas, and I told Harry that, but it never did seem to take on him, somehow."

"Now, look here, Sim, we've got to stop that thing. We can't have any more trouble like that. Did you tell Harry that if it hadn't been for Richard, we might never have caught Ulysses?"

"Naw, I never did tell him that."

"Well, you tell him that. It's a fact. Suppose Richard had told him to keep a-running and had helped him on his way. We might never have caught him."

"Yas, but Harry thinks mebbe Richard did tell him that and tried to git him to run, but he was too skeered, and we was too hot on his trail."

"Now, Sim, you know we've got to stop that thing, and are you going to help me or not?"

"Whut kin I do, Mr. Will?"

"You can do more with Harry than anybody else can."

"Yas, that's so, but if the Ku Klux git Richard Sanders, won't none of us be to blame. It won't be no business of ours."

"Oh, Sim, can't you see that the whole thing is our business?"

"Waal, Mr. Will, I always did say it about you, that you took too much on yourself. You borry other folks's troubles."

"Oh, Sim, Sim, can't you see?—But you will do the best you can to hold Harry back, won't you?"

"Yas, I'll do the best I kin," said Sim doubtfully.

"Well, let's go and get the coffin," said Mr. Robertson impatiently. "You can come back by here and take the things Mrs. Robertson has for you."

"Mr. Will, I don't want you to think I ever will forgit whut you all have done for us."

"Well, the best way for you to show it, is to try to help us keep down further trouble," said Mr. Robertson shortly. "But we will go on to town and see Mr. Hiram. He will attend to the grave and everything."

"Yas, it's funny, ain't it, Mr. Will, how he takes all the funerals on hisself?" said Sim.

"He has got a big heart," answered Mr. Robertson, "and he feels that's the one way he can help folks."

"Yas, for rich or po' he'll see to the grave-diggin', and never a cent for his trouble. Can't nobody keep from likin' Mr. Hiram."

When they reached town and acquainted Mr. Hiram with the sad news, he said, "Poor little thing, so she had to die," and his voice broke. "But you will let me see to the grave-diggin' and everything, won't you, Sim?"

"Thank you, thank you kindly, Mr. Hiram. We thought we'd have the funeral Sunday evenin' 'bout three o'clock. Dr. Anderson said she'd keep that long, an' it's jus' bustin' her mama's heart in two to give her up," and Sim sobbed aloud.

"There, there, Sim," said Mr. Hiram, "I'll see that the notices are gotten out, and the flowers and the hearse and the pall-bearers and the grave dug. Mr. Will, when you go back, tell John Ramsey to come on over here. He's not much good at anything else, but he's the best grave-digger in the county."

Two hours later at the cemetery, John Ramsey, under the direction of Mr. Hiram, had marked off the grave and showed his helper, the negro deaf mute named Handy, where to begin digging. Before sticking in his own spade, he paused to wipe the sweat from his face with a soiled bandana handkerchief, and said, "Mr. Hiram, me and you has put lots of folks away, ain't we?"

"Yes, we have, John."

"But we ain't never put away nobody like dis befo'!"

"No, thank God, and I hope we may never have to do it again," said Mr. Hiram.

"I don't see whut makes some niggers so low down," said John. "I don't never have no trouble wid de white folks. An' whut good do it do? Ulysses done got hiss'ef burnt up, an' whut dey gwine to do to Madison yit, ain't nobody knows."

"Yes, that's so, John."

"I say a nigger is a nigger jes' like a mule is a mule, an' dey ain't no way to make a horse outen him. You kin let his mane an' tail grow, so he looks somep'n like a horse, an' sometimes he gits some of de ways of a horse, but nunck-unh, look out, de fust thing you know, he done give hisse'f away, an' he ain't nuthin' but jes' plain mule."

"Yes, there's a lot of truth in that," said Mr. Hiram.

"Waal, dey's one thing," said John, "I never did like dat Madison nohow. I never did want to have no truck wid him, but he kep' on a-shovin' dem shotes on me twell I 'greed to buy 'em. An' hyeer jus' de yuther day come along a feller an' say Mr. Senter kin git dat money out of me ag'in, 'cause it wuz stolen property, when I done already paid Madison. How 'bout dat, Mr. Hiram?"

"Oh, I don't think there is any need to worry about that, John. Everybody has too much else to think about now."

"An' hyeer come de Ku Kluxes an' ever'thing, an' it looks sorter like in a way it all runs back to dem shotes."

"No, John, it's hard to tell how far anything runs back. If Madison hadn't been the kind of nigger he was, or if Ulysses had been different, or if Mr. Senter hadn't had the shotes, or if there had been no such thing as the Nineteenth, or if Madison had had some money, or if our forefathers hadn't wanted slaves—oh, you never can find the real beginning of anything!"

"Dat's sho' de truth, Mr. Hiram. I never had thought about dat. An' den you never kin tell whar nuthin's gwine to end, neither. Maybe we gwine to have lots mo' trouble yit."

"Well, I hope not," said Mr. Hiram. "I hope things will quiet down now."

"Yassuh, but ain't Mr. Will talkin' a whole lot 'g'inst dem Ku Kluxes?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Nuthin', I reckon, but it looks to me like dis is a good time to keep yo' mouf shet."

"But I don't think you can ever do that, John," said Mr. Hiram, smiling.

"Nunck-unh, Mr. Hiram, dey's a lot of things dis nigger ain't never gwine to say nuthin' 'bout befo' de Jedgment Day, an' Mr. Gabriel gwine to have to press him mighty hard den, haw! haw! haw!"

"You ought not to be laughing loud that a way, while you are digging a grave, John."

"Naw, suh, Mr. Hiram, I sho' oughtn't. I plum forgot. But I been a-thinkin', an' I hope dey ain't nuthin' gwine to happen to Mr. Will."

"Oh, the Ku Klux say they are not going to hurt anybody except them that have been up to mischief."

"Waal, dey ain't gwine to do nuthin' to Mr. Will, den, but den ag'in folks don't love to be talked ag'inst. I say when you talks, talk in favor of somebody."

"But you've just been talking against Madison and Ulysses."

"Yassuh, dat's a fac', but one of dem niggers is plum burnt up, an' de yuther one is inside de jail, haw, haw, haw!"

"Well, get to work now," said Mr. Hiram, "and stop that laughing. I've got to go and see about the other things."

When Mr. Hiram was gone, John took up his spade, pushed it into the earth, and said to his helper, "Handy,

dey's one thing I likes about you, a man kin talk to you all he wants to, an' you don't never break in on him, 'cause you can't hyear nuthin' he says, an' if you could, you couldn't say nuthin' about it. Dey sho' would be lots less trouble in dis worl', if ever'body wuz like you, Handy.

"Whut I want to say anything to Mr. Hiram 'bout dem shotes for? Or dem Ku Kluxes? Dey wuzn't no sense in it. An' it ain't gwine to do nobody no good. S'pose Mr. Hiram wuz to git de notion dat I knowed all de time dem shotes wuz stole, or s'pose somep'n wuz to happen to Mr. Will an' Mr. Hiram wuz to say, 'Unh-hunh, dat nigger knowed somep'n an' he wouldn't tell an' now see whut's happened!' Den whar would I be? An' I don't know nuthin' about none of it. But somehow or nuther when you is diggin' a grave, yo' min' gits to goin' 'roun' an' 'roun', an' de fust thing you know, yo' tongue jes' runs you blabity-blab right smack into de heart of trouble."

It was the biggest funeral that Compton had ever seen. People came from miles and miles around. The grave was a bank of flowers. And for once the Senter family was the cynosure of all eyes.

In spite of her grief, Mrs. Senter could not help but have some feeling of complacency. She was dressed just as she felt the occasion demanded, the coffin was a metal casket, and thanks to the good offices of Mrs. Robertson and other ladies of the community, the children made a creditable appearance.

When it was over and they had reached home, she said, "Sim, wouldn't it be nice to have good clothes all of the time?"

"I'm s'prised at you, Jennie, to be thinkin' of clothes at sich a time as this!"

"Oh, Sim, Sim, men folks can't never understand," she cried, and turning from him, she threw her arms around a post of the porch, leaned her weather-beaten cheek against it, and wept. Her spirit was bowed down under the desolation of poverty as well as that of bereavement, and she was overwhelmed with the realization that for her neither would ever end.

CHAPTER XXIX

MONDAY, Bob and Mr. Robertson went to take the Senter children back home. During their absence Cindy came in to talk matters over with Mrs. Robertson.

"Yassum, Miss Mamie, jes' like you wuz sayin', de bes' thing'll be for me to marry Cyrus, I reckon," she declared.

"I'm glad that you have come to that conclusion, Cindy. It is the only thing for a respectable woman and a Christian to do."

"Yassum, an' dem is two things I always is been."

"What are you talking about, Cindy?"

"Why, whut you said, Miss Mamie, I always is been a respectable woman an' a Christian. Ain't nobody ever hyeared of me cuttin' up an' runnin' roun' loose, an' dancin' an' fightin' like some of dese yuther niggers. I'm stiddy an' hard-workin' an' reliable, an' I gives money to de church all de time, an' dat's whut makes me mad."

"Why, Cindy! does giving money to the church make you mad?"

"Nome, not prezackly dat, but whut comes of it."

"What has become of it?"

"Waal 'um, you ain't hyeared about Sally, is you, Miss Mamie?"

"No, what about Sally?"

"She is gone, gone for good, gone to de City."

"Oh, has she?"

"Yassum, when you all wuz at de funeral yestiddy

evenin', I got kinder lonesome an' thought I'd go down to de station. An' who did I see but Sally, all dressed up fit to kill? An' I axed her is she goin' away. An' she say hunh! she's tired of Compton, it's too little for her, she's gwine where she kin have a good time.

"An' I axed whar is dat. An' she say down to de City. An' when I say how long is she gwine to stay, she say she ain't never comin' back."

"Well, I think it is a good riddance," said Mrs. Robertson.

"Yassum, I think so, too. But I tol' her shucks! she ain't got no money to stay in de City wid. An' den whut do you reckon, Miss Mamie?"

"I don't know, Cindy, what?"

"She reached down in her stockin' an' pulled out a roll of bills an' shuck 'em in my face. I never wuz so outdone. An' she say you see dis, it's Babtis' money, an' she laughed like she would bust. Yes, says she, it's Babtis' money."

"What did she mean by that?"

"Dat's whut I axed her, an' she say, ax Brother Sanders, he kin tell me. An' when I say stop yo' foolin' roun' hyeer, an' tell me whar you got dat money from, she say Brother Sanders got sorry for her an' gin it to her. An' den she laughed some mo'.

"An' I tol' her she wuz a-lyin', an' she better mind out how she come a-slanderatin' Brother Sanders 'roun' me. An' she say I kin have Brother Sanders for all of her. She say she done wid him, an' she gwine to de City whar dey's some sho' 'nuff folks. She say she 'spises de country, an' den she laughed some mo'. An' den she say, naw, I can't have Brother Sanders, 'cause

he tol' her if he gwine to stay good, he got to marry, an' he gwine to marry one of Brother Joe Williams's gals.

"An' I come mighty nigh to slappin' her in de face right dere on de flatform, 'cause she say Brother Sanders say I been a-settin' my cap for him, but he can't affo'd to fool 'long wid me, 'cause I'm too ole an' fat an' black an' ain't got a good reppitation. Now, whut do you think of dat, Miss Mamie?"

"Oh, I wouldn't pay any attention to what Sally says."

"Nome, I wouldn't ha' neither if it hadn't ha' been for dat money. But money talks, Miss Mamie. An' whar did she git it from?"

"Did she have much money?"

"Yassum, she's boun' to 've had 'bout fifty dollars."

"Well, that is a good deal, but I hope she didn't really get it from Richard. It will hurt Mr. Will so, to hear that Richard has had anything to do with Sally. He has been so hopeful that Richard would really do a good work among you all."

"Yassum, dat's whut I says, Miss Mamie, let him do a good work, an' not spen' all his time skylarkin' 'roun' wid dem Williams gals. Hunh, I wouldn't wipe my foot on him. I'm mighty nigh a mind to go and jine de Methodists. Anyhow, Cyrus is a Methodist, an' if we gits married, it may be de bes' for both of us to belong to de same church."

"Well, of course, you would have to judge for yourself about that, Cindy, but I would hate for you to do anything that would hinder any real good that Richard is trying to do."

"Nome, I ain't gwine to hender. All I'm gwine to do, is to git out of his way."

"But do you think, Cindy, there really was anything improper between Richard and Sally?"

"Tell me dis, Miss Mamie, did you ever hyear of a man givin' a woman fifty dollars jes' for pure properness?"

"No, I don't know that I did," said Mrs. Robertson, smiling. "But then Sally might be telling a story about where she got the fifty dollars from."

"Nome, I been kinder keepin' an eye on her, an' dey been somep'n nuther gwine on twixt her and him as sho' as you bawn, Miss Mamie. Sich gwine-ons makes me sick, an' I wouldn't be s'prised if I wuz to up an' marry Cyrus nex' week."

"Well, at any rate, that'll be some good to come out of the thing, Cindy. It will be nicer and better every way for you and Cyrus to marry."

"Yassum, I reckon so," said Cindy, without enthusiasm, "but up to now, Miss Mamie, I been de top rail on de fence. An' jes' you watch whut I say, when we gits married, it's gwine to be a mighty tussle for me to stay up dere."

"Oh, I don't know, Cindy, I believe you can hold your own anywhere, and I think it would be a fine thing for Richard to marry one of Joe's girls. They are good girls, and any one of 'em would make Richard a nice wife."

"Waal 'um, if Cyrus gits de upper han' of me, he's gwine to know he's passed through somep'n, an' as for Richard Sanders, it don't make no diffunce to me who he marries or who he don't marry. All I axes is don't lem' me hyear him preach no mo'. He say he don't believe in shoutin' nohow, an' I is a shoutin' woman. I always is been a shoutin' woman, an' I 'specks to shout

twell I die.—But seems like I smell somep'n a-burnin'. I better be gittin' back to de kitchen."

That night Mrs. Robertson said to her husband, "Will, Cindy was telling me to-day that Sally Ramsey has left for good, she has gone to the City."

"Well, it's a good thing if it's true," said Mr. Robertson, "or, at least, it's good for the country." Then he added with a smile, "I am afraid that Sally is an undesirable citizen."

"But Cindy said she had a lot of money."

"She got it from Randy Shallow, I reckon, but if that's so, she probably hasn't left for good."

"No, Cindy said she got it from Richard Sanders."

"From Richard Sanders!"

"Yes, from Richard. Cindy said something has been going on between them, and that Richard told Sally if he was to stay good, he would have to marry, and that he was going to marry one of Joe Williams's girls."

"Yes, I have heard that he is going to marry Lucindy," said Mr. Robertson thoughtfully.

"Isn't it odd, Will, that he is going to marry the blackest one of the three?"

"Yes, but she is the oldest, nearest his age."

"Still, he might have any one of 'em he wants, and it would be more natural for him to want the brightest in color, and that would be Ella."

"Yes, I reckon so," said Mr. Robertson absently. "But do you think from what Cindy said that there really was anything improper between Richard and Sally?"

"Well, Cindy said she never heard of a man giving a woman fifty dollars for pure properness," answered Mrs. Robertson with a gleam of amusement in her eye.

"No," said Mr. Robertson, "but I had hoped—well, the way of it must have been that Richard couldn't stand against the temptation of Sally; he found himself entangled with her, and then to get rid of her, gave her the money, and to guard himself, made up his mind to marry at once. Well, that's the best thing he can do."

"But isn't it ridiculous, Will, that a preacher who was going to do so much for the spiritual welfare of his people, should get into such a mess right away?"

"It's bad, yes," answered Mr. Robertson, "it's unfortunate. It'll hurt Richard a lot, especially among the white people, and Cindy will spread it everywhere. But, after all, if he marries and settles down, maybe it will be forgotten. Oh, it looks as if everything is going wrong! But what could he do? Any man is likely to slip up, especially when the women pursue him, as is certain to have happened to Richard. And then what could he do, if he is a good man?—He could hardly do anything better than what Richard has done and is proposing to do."

"But, Will, you are always trying to excuse people, especially niggers. Most of the folks here will think he ought to be run out of the community."

"Yes, that's so. But the next preacher they get might be as bad or worse, and Richard really is educated, and can instruct his people and do a world of good among them. And I believe he wants to do it. And there is no telling how Sally circumvented him. She is a regular baggage, and she has lots of sense and lots of enterprise."

"Oh, Will, if a preacher can't stand before a bad woman, he is not much of a preacher. The same is true of any man, whether preacher or not."

"Well, honey, you know even David had his Bath-sheba."

"Yes, that's so, but you are not going to bother with trying to uphold Richard, are you?"

"No, I don't think there'll be any bother about it. Of course I wouldn't like to see him run out of the country, because I think he can and will perform a real service here."

"But if they try to run him out, Will, you are not going to try to stop them?"

"Oh, honey, kiss me good night. They are not going to do anything like that. You are always afraid that something is going to happen to your Will, bless your heart, aren't you, honey?"

"Well, Will, I—I—"

"Here, put your head on my arm, now; I'll blow out the light, and let's go to sleep."

CHAPTER XXX

On Wednesday morning the community of Compton was startled by the news that during the preceding night the Ku Klux Klan had "got" Henry Thompson.

About noon a messenger from Rodney Parker, the sheriff, came to summon Mr. Robertson to come armed to a conference to be held in the jury room of the court house at three o'clock.

There were present at the conference, besides Mr. Robertson, Rodney Parker, Judge Mowry, Squire Meekin, Brother Maxcy, Brother McPherson, the Baptist minister, Jasper Deane, senior, Mr. Hiram Shorter, Samuel Deane, brother of Jasper, Dr. Anderson, the four County Commissioners, Professor Adamson, principal of the high school, Mr. Perkins, a merchant, Joe Maroney, the county clerk, and Daniel Barrow, a lawyer.

Rodney Parker opened the meeting by saying, "I have called you gentlemen together to consult about what is to be done. And I asked you to meet in this room because here we can be free from interruption. Some others that I asked to come, sent excuses or have failed to show up. Banker Meredith said he couldn't afford to take sides on anything like this. The County Judge said he was sick, but he looked mighty healthy yesterday. The County Attorney is out of town. The Assessor and the Collector said they'd rather not come. And the Mayor says he has pressing business engagements for this afternoon. I thought about asking Editor

Raston, but I knew he couldn't resist the temptation to put everything in the paper, and I didn't know whether we would want everything printed right now or not. Tony Peters said he would come, but he is not here. The same is true of several others. If I hear no objection, I will take it that it is the sense of the meeting that we go ahead with those present."

He paused.

"All right, there being no objection, we'll hear from Dr. Anderson. He knows more about this thing than anybody else."

"Dr. Anderson! Dr. Anderson!" cried several voices.

Dr. Anderson rose, cleared his throat, and began: "About two o'clock this morning I was called to Henry Thompson's house. When I got there, I found Henry in bed, groaning and cussing. There was some tar on his face and head and some feathers still sticking in his hair. Finally I got out of him a more or less connected story to the effect that last night about ten o'clock he heard a noise in the yard. He went out to see what it was. He was grabbed by some masked men, was blindfolded and gagged, and his hands tied, and was taken somewhere in an automobile, not so very far. There he was stripped naked and emasculated, and then warm tar was poured over him, and then it sounded as if a feather bed was cut open, and the slit tick was thrown over his head, almost smothering him; his hands were still tied, and the feathers stuck all over him.

"They wrapped him up in the bed-ticking, to keep the tar from getting on the automobile, he thought, then brought him back to the court house square and dumped him out naked, except for the tar and feathers, telling him that he and all of his folks were given a week to

leave Compton, or something worse would happen to him and them.

"He managed to get home, where his folks got most of the tar and feathers off of him before I came. I redressed his wounds, though they were very well dressed when I first saw them."

Until then not a man interrupted the speaker with a word, but as Dr. Anderson paused, Jasper Deane, senior, said, "If his wounds were dressed, there must have been a doctor with the Ku Klux."

"Yes," said Dr. Anderson, "there must have been, for the operation was performed by a man who knew what he was about."

"Did you ask Dr. Bolton to come here?" asked Jasper Deane, senior, of the sheriff.

"Yes, but he sent word he was up late last night with a patient, and didn't feel very well," answered the sheriff.

Dr. Anderson resumed, "Henry was one of the maddest men I ever saw, and he said a lot of things I wouldn't repeat if I didn't think it necessary to do so, in order to avoid further trouble."

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Perkins.

"He said that he recognized some of the men, and that he was going to kill 'em, if he never did anything else. And we all know that Henry is a man of his word, and he'll do it. I told Rod Parker about it, and that's one of the reasons why he has called you together here."

"Who did he say he recognized?" asked Mr. Perkins with evident agitation.

"Well, I hate to say. I don't like to be in the attitude of a tale-bearer or the betrayer of a confidence. But then again I don't want anybody to feel that I am afraid to say. What do you think about it, Mr. Sheriff?"

"Well," answered Rodney Parker, "I think we all ought to know. I think all of us here can be counted on to try and preserve law and order. What think you all?"

"I think it would be best for us to know," said Brother Maxcy.

"Nobody objecting, I take it that all of you agree with Brother Maxcy," said the sheriff. "Go ahead, doctor."

"He said he recognized one of the men by his voice, and that was Randy Shallow, that there was a doctor with 'em, because somebody called him doctor, and that that must have been Dr. Bolton, because he knew it wasn't me, and that he recognized one of the young men that caught him in the yard because that young man had lost the little finger of his left hand."

"Hold on there, doctor," cried Jasper, senior, in great excitement. "Hold on there! Everybody knows that my son, Jasper, junior, has lost the little finger on his left hand. Is there anybody here who will tell me that my son belongs to the Ku Klux Klan?" He glared about him in wild anger.

"That's not the question, Jasper," said his brother Samuel. "The question is how to keep Henry Thompson from killing him."

"I'll keep him from killing him. I'll go and shoot that low down eunuch where he lies in the bed of his nigger mistress!" shouted Jasper, senior.

"Oh, no, you won't, Jasper," said the sheriff quietly. "We are not going to have any shooting. Hold him there, Samuel. Catch hold of him, Mr. Hiram."

"It's a lie, an infernal lie," cried Jasper, senior, struggling with Samuel and Mr. Hiram. "I haven't brought my boys up to join a gang of trifling loafers that ramp

around at night to stir up the niggers and destroy property!"

It was some minutes before they could quiet Jasper, senior, so as to go on with the proceedings.

When quiet was restored, the sheriff said, "We all know Henry. And we know we are going to have some murders on our hands, if we don't prevent 'em. If the Ku Klux keep on, we are going to have murders, anyhow. But the case we've got to deal with right now is Henry's. I don't see anything to do but to start a peace-bond proceeding. And of course nobody will go on Henry's bond to keep the peace, because that wouldn't do any good. He wouldn't keep it, the bondsmen would be soaked and the murders committed. The only thing I see to do is to swear out a warrant before Squire Meekin here and put Henry in jail."

"It looks like it's pretty hard on old Henry to put him in jail after all that has happened to him," said one of the Commissioners with a snigger.

"Well, what else would you suggest?" asked Judge Mowry sarcastically.

The Commissioner merely grinning sheepishly, Lawyer Barrow spoke up, "Yes, put him in jail by all means. He is a danger to the community."

"Especially to the members of the Ku Klux Klan," said Judge Mowry with a little smile of malice.

"Do you intimate that I am a member?" asked Lawyer Barrow.

"No, I don't intimate it. I know and affirm it," answered Judge Mowry.

"I refuse to take further part in this silly proceeding," declared Barrow, and stalked out of the door.

"Well, if any other member of the Klan is present and

he feels like revealing himself or leaving," said the sheriff, "this might be a good time. However, he's welcome to stay. We haven't got anything to hide. It might be well for him to stay, learn all he can, and warn his fellow uplifters of public morals by the road of maiming and murder, so that they will not be hurt. We don't want anybody killed, Ku Klux or not."

Then there rose in his place Brother McPherson, the Baptist minister, pale as a sheet and trembling. "Brethren," he said, "I want to confess. I am a member of the Klan. I joined it without realizing what it would lead to. It was presented to me mainly as a bulwark of the Protestant religion. I thought of it more as a defense against the spread of Catholicism and the power of the Jews than as anything else. And I was told that the head of it was once an evangelist—a Methodist, it is true, but still an evangelist—so I joined."

"Well, what do you want to do, Brother McPherson?" asked the sheriff.

"There is but one thing for me to do as a Christian minister, and that is to withdraw from the Klan."

"Oh, I mean now. What do you want to do now? Go or stay?" the sheriff asked impatiently.

"I move," said Mr. Robertson, "that Brother McPherson be invited and urged to stay with us. We need the benefit of his counsel and influence."

The motion was carried unanimously, and Brother McPherson said in acknowledgment, "Brethren, you don't know how this touches me. I feel that I had forfeited your confidence by having done a foolish thing, a wicked and sinful thing, but, God be praised, you have forgiven me!" He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Mr. Perkins rose, and said with many pauses and hesitations, as one not used to public speaking, "Gentlemen—as you all know—I'm, ah, a member of, ah, Brother McPherson's church, and when I, ah, heard that he was to be a member of, ah, ah, the Klan, I joined, too. I, ah, am a hundred per cent American, and, gentlemen, I, ah, feel that many of you, ah, fail to realize, ah, the danger to our, ah, beloved institutions in letting the, ah, niggers, Jews, and Catholics, ah, have free sway in this, ah, ah, our glorious country, the ah, home of the, ah, free and land of the ah, brave, ah, especially the, ah, Catholics. They burned people, ah, once, and they would, ah, do it again, if, ah—"

"But they never tarred, feathered, and castrated 'em, did they?" asked County Clerk Maroney.

"Well, ah, ah, I don't know. Nothing, ah, is too bad for them, ah, to do. But, gentlemen, I, ah, wish to say that, ah, since my, ah, pastor says it is a wicked and sinful thing to, ah, ah, belong to the, ah, ah, Klan, and I may add it is also a, ah, ah, dangerous thing, I mean, ah, ah, to the community, I, too, am, ah, going to resign."

He sat down amid laughter, but one of the Commissioners, named Allen, jumped to his feet, declaring with fiery emphasis, "I am a member of the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan, and I'm proud of it. I say to hell with all of the foes of our proud constitution, the blood-sucking Jews, the hyphenated Huns, and the Pope-worshiping Catholics, to hell with 'em! And this is a white man's country. Niggers must be shown their place and kept in it, and by God! they will be! And the runners after nigger wenches are going to be cured, and cured with the knife. Do you get me? We want

no mulatto babies. And I serve notice on all of you here and now that I am going to stay here, and I am going to report the doings of this meeting to the enshrouded knights of the Ku Klux Klan!"

"My God!" exclaimed Mr. Perkins.

"I move that he be invited and urged to stay with us," said Judge Mowry, "we need the benefit of his counsel and influence, ha! ha! ha!"

His laughter was echoed on all sides, and all eyes were turned on Mr. Robertson, who rose, blushing, and said, "Well, the joke is on me, but I think I was right—"

"Oh, of course you were right, Will," said Judge Mowry affectionately, and then he added with a little smile of mockery, "that's what's the matter with you, you are always so damned right. But let's get down to business. It don't make any difference who is here. The whole order of the invisible and inopportune knights are welcome to hear what we have to say and to know what we are going to do."

"Allow me a moment, please," said Brother McPherson, "there is one more statement that I wish to make. I was not with those members of the Klan who mutilated Henry Thompson, if indeed it was members of the Klan. I wish all of you to know that I would never have countenanced anything like that. And whatever Judge Mowry may say, I deeply appreciate the motion made by Brother Robertson and its adoption by this body, and—"

"If you are through, Brother McPherson, we will proceed to business," said the sheriff.

Brother McPherson sat down.

"As I see it," said Judge Mowry, "the only thing to do, is for somebody, preferably Dr. Anderson, as he

heard Henry's threats, to make the affidavit before Squire Meekin, and let Squire Meekin issue the order of arrest to the sheriff, and let him commit Henry to jail. We can hold him a year that way if necessary, and I reckon the whole thing will blow over by that time."

"But what if somebody comes up and offers to make bail?" asked Mr. Perkins.

"Oh, I'll take care of that," said Squire Meekin; "whoever the bondsmen are, they won't be satisfactory."

"Oh, well, there's no danger of that, anyhow," said Samuel Deane.

"What are you talking that way for?" asked Jasper, senior. "We want to be certain. We don't want that low down cur sneaking around here in the dark, ready to jump at everybody's throats."

"The putting of him in jail will be certain," said Judge Mowry, "there is no need to worry about that."

"I will make the oath," said Dr. Anderson, "but there's no use in disturbing Henry to-day. He won't be able to do anything for a day or so yet."

"I say do it to-day," urged Jasper, senior.

"Well, all right," said the sheriff. "We can fix up a comfortable bed in the jail for Henry, that is, if Dr. Anderson don't think it too dangerous to Henry to move him."

"Oh, no, there won't be any danger to him," said the doctor.

"Now, that being disposed of," said the sheriff, "what are we going to do about the Ku Klux Klan?"

"I don't know whether it will be better for Brother McPherson to resign or not," said Professor Adamson. "If he should stay in, he might be able to exert a stronger influence toward restraining the other members from

acts of violence. I gather that many respectable men are members of the order now. If all of them pull out, then the Klan will be left altogether in the hands of the reckless, irresponsible, or vicious elements, and there is no telling what may happen."

"No," said Brother McPherson, "my first duty is to the body of Christian people whose guide I am supposed to be, and since I realize the probable outcome of the Klan's acts, that duty calls me imperatively to resign. However, knowing the members as I do, I believe I can convince them of the unwisdom of further violence, and I pledge myself to try to do that."

"If Brother McPherson can accomplish that," said Brother Maxcy, "then there will be no further trouble, and the problem is solved."

"But," said Judge Mowry, "he can not accomplish that. With all due respect to him, I don't think it matters much whether he resigns or not, or how he uses his influence. The order was founded for the purpose of forcing some people to do what other people think they ought to do. The whole thing was born of intolerance and the holier-than-thou spirit. It intends to make non-members be good according to its definition of good. It is bound to work through force, and the only kind of force it can employ is physical violence, and that must be planned and carried out in secret, because, otherwise, the law would prevent it. It is the logical outcome of that very intolerance that has long been preached in these parts by irresponsible, loose-mouthed, fly-by-night evangelists who can't make money enough staying in one place, so they go about to peddle their narrow and vicious sectarianism by sensational sermons in places where they can skim off the financial cream of the religiosity of the

community and then flit with their ill-gotten gains, leaving behind them an intensified bitterness of sectarian hate. I—"

"But, Judge, Judge," said Mr. Robertson, "we are not here to consider modern evangelism, to hear it praised or denounced. Evidently you feel intensely on that subject; many of us do not agree with you, but that's another matter. We are concerned with what must be done to modify, abate, or—or, stop the activity of the Ku Klux Klan. I confess I am surprised to learn who are some of those who belong to it or sympathize with it. I can not understand the processes of their reason, but we are confronted with a condition that must be remedied, whatever its causes may have been."

"You are right, Will," answered Judge Mowry. "I was getting off of the point. There are some things I feel so intensely about that I can't be reasonable.—Well, we've got to combat the Ku Klux Klan either by reason or by force. Which shall it be?"

"As a member of the Klan," said Commissioner Allen, "I want to say that one reason why we propose to see that criminals are punished, is the lax enforcement of the law by the peace-officers and the courts, and the delays and evasions of justice through the manipulations of tricky lawyers. Sheriff Parker and Judge Mowry can put that in their pipes and smoke it. If you won't enforce the law, we will, or we will see that criminals don't walk the streets free, unashamed, and unpunished."

"That's an old question, and we can't settle it here," said the sheriff. "If all the people I arrest were convicted—"

"Many innocent folks would be sent to the penitentiary," interposed Judge Mowry.

"Well, you never have arrested Henry Thompson," said Commissioner Allen, "and you've always known—"

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Brother Maxcy, "we are not getting anywhere. For myself, I will preach on the Ku Klux Klan next Sunday, and not in anger. I will try to make my hearers see the folly of trying to reform the world by such methods, and the anarchy that a continuance of them must bring about."

"I will do the same," said Brother McPherson, "and I move that a committee of three, say, Judge Mowry, Professor Adamson, and Brother Robertson, be appointed to write and print in our county paper the best argument they can make."

The motion was carried.

"How would it do," said Samuel Deane, "to call a mass meeting of the citizens in the court house and let us find some one to address them? What we need, I think, is to bring the whole thing out in the open. I think that is the real American way of doing, or it ought to be. Much of the wrong that goes on here or anywhere, does go on because people cover it up, and are afraid to face it openly. If our courts are not doing what they should, if our churches are not so good as they ought to be, if criminals walk around free and unashamed, if our society is threatened with rottenness, I say let's have a public, open meeting, take stock of ourselves, and realize where we stand. I believe that in such a way a sound public opinion will be so revived that much good will result all around."

"Yes," said Jasper, senior, with a snarl, "that's the

way you've been thinking all of your life, and that's the reason why you haven't got anything. You've been thinking that the people want to do right, when the fact is they don't. Nothing is further from their minds. They want to do wrong. They want to cheat and lie and steal, and they are going to do it, and there ain't any way to stop 'em except to put 'em in jail. Look how I've brought up my boys, and now they say one of them is a Ku Klux. Oh, I'll pull him out all right, if they are not lying on him, but your public meeting will end in moonshine like all your other plans. I say let the grand jury get to work and indict a whole lot of people, that's what I say."

"That's a good idea, Jasper," said Judge Mowry, "but I think Samuel's open, public meeting will be a good thing, too, if only we could get a man that everybody liked and trusted, to make the main speech."

"Well, there ought not to be any trouble about that," said Mr. Hiram, "we've got him right here. What's the matter with Mr. Will Robertson?"

"No, no," said Mr. Robertson, "I—I thank you, Mr. Hiram, but I'm not a public speaker, and your partiality for me—"

"I want to thank Mr. Hiram, too," said Judge Mowry. "The only reason I didn't think of Will was because I didn't think of him as a public speaker, but the people will come mighty near to believing what he says, you can count on that."

"That's what I think," said the sheriff, "this ain't a time when we need a speaker so much; what we need now is a man."

"I move the choice be made unanimous," said Brother McPherson.

"I second it," cried Professor Adamson.

The motion was carried without dissent.

"Gentlemen, I will undertake it," said Mr. Robertson, with emotion, "but I must have some time for preparation."

"Of course," said the sheriff. "How would next Tuesday do, Will?"

"I think that would be time enough."

"All right, then, we will call the meeting for next Tuesday at eleven o'clock, to give the country people time to get in."

"Good," said Judge Mowry, "first, then, we'll try reason, and if that don't work—"

"We'll try force," said the sheriff.

The meeting adjourned.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was dusk of a cloudy evening when Mr. Robertson left the court house. He thought he would be late to supper, so he turned off of the high-road before he came to the bridge. He would take the short cut through the creek bottom, ford the creek, and go home through the bottom gate. He urged his horse to a sharp trot and kept him at that pace where the ground permitted. But just as he was approaching the bottom gate, he heard off to the right a tumult of blows and angry exclamations and the loud snorting of a horse.

"Thud! thud! thud!" blows fell, and a negro's voice was shouting, "Dar now! Take dat! Dat's right, kick! R'ar up! Pull back! But I got you."

"Thud! thud! thud!"

"Twist an' squum an' snort, but I got you. How you like dat an' dat an' dat? I'm gwine to beat you to death. I wush you wuz him. Oh, Lawd, I wush you wuz him!"

"Thud! thud! thud!"

Mr. Robertson, amazed, turned quickly and rode toward the noise. Through the gathering darkness he made out a figure of a man beating a horse. "Here, stop that!" he shouted.

But the man was so intent he did not hear the cry. "Hunh, Saladin! I'll Saladin you. Take dat. Hunh, how you like it? How you like it? An' dat an' dat an' dat!"

The horse reared and plunged, fell and scrambled to

its feet again, and snorted wildly, but it was powerless to escape, it was tied securely to a tree.

For a moment Mr. Robertson sat dazed. Could it be that somebody was beating Saladin? Then recovering himself, he dashed forward and struck the man over the head with his pistol. Groaning, the man fell prostrate. Mr. Robertson dismounted, hurried to the horse, looked at it intently, "It is Saladin," he said, "it is Saladin! What on earth?—Whoa, Saladin! Whoa, boy!"

The horse pulled away. Mr. Robertson advanced, holding his hand out, "Whoa, boy, whoa! There's a good fellow. I'm not going to hurt you, Saladin. Whoa, whoa, boy!"

He patted the horse on the neck and soothed him. But Saladin winced as if even a gentle touch hurt him. At last he stood trembling while Mr. Robertson examined him as best he could in the gloom. He had been most cruelly beaten.

The prostrate man groaned. Mr. Robertson turned to him, stirred him with his foot, and said angrily, "Here, get up! Who are you? What do you mean, you infernal scoundrel?"

The man sat up, looked about him, dazed, saying, "Whar, whar is I? Oh, oh, my head!"

He put his hand to his head.

"Why, my God!" exclaimed Mr. Robertson, "it's Joe —Joe Williams!"

"Um-m-m-m," groaned Joe, "my head! It's about to bust."

"Joe, Joe," said Mr. Robertson, "what on earth do you mean? What has come over you?"

"Is dat you, Mr. Will?"

"Yes, it's me. I'm a mind to tie you to that tree and

give you what you were giving Saladin. What do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"Wait, wait, Mr. Will, I had somep'n I wanted to give you."

Painfully he reached into the pocket of his pants, pulled out his closed hand, and then opening it palm up, extended it to Mr. Robertson. "Dar, dar it is, Mr. Will."

"What is it, Joe? I don't make it out. You must be crazy."

"Take it, take it, Mr. Will. It's de medal."

"The medal? What medal?"

"Yo'—yo' boy's medal. He's done ruint my gal!"

Mr. Robertson took the medal, turned it over and over, looked at it as if it were an unknown thing. "Why, Joe, what are you talking about? Where did you get this medal?"

"I got it from her."

"From who?"

"From Ella, my gal, Ella."

"Where did she get it?"

"She got it from Mr. Bob; he give it to her; he's done ruint her."

"Oh, Joe, Joe, that can not be!"

"It's so, Mr. Will. She tol' me. I seen her wid it, an' I whupped her twell she tol' me. But dey's somep'n runnin' in my eye, Mr. Will. I reckon it's blood."

"Here, Joe, take this handkerchief. Wipe it off. Can you walk?"

"I don't know, Mr. Will."

"Here, give me your hand. I'll help you up. Can you stand?"

"I don't know, Mr. Will. I feels mighty dizzy."

"I'll catch your arm. Steady now, we'll walk just

over there to the creek, and you can wash your face and head. Now give me the handkerchief. I'll wet it for you. Now sit down here with your back against this tree. Now here's the handkerchief, it's wet. Press it to your wound."

Two or three times Mr. Robertson wet and pressed out the handkerchief. With it Joe washed his wound and stanched the bleeding.

"So you were beating Saladin for your revenge?"

"Whut could I do, Mr. Will? You know how I've raised my gals."

"Yes, I know, Joe. And you couldn't do anything."

"I went up to de big house to see you 'bout it dis evenin'. You wuzn't dar. I wuz waitin' for you, when 'long come Cyrus an' axed me if I wuz gwine to stay, to feed for him. He say he wanted to go to town and see if he couldn't make 'rangements to borry some money from Mr. Tony Peters to git married on. He's gwine to marry Cindy nex' week. When I went to feed, somep'n nuther said to me, 'If you can't git him, you kin git de nex' thing to him.' So I brung Saladin down hyeer, an' whupped him. Dat's de truth, so help me Gaad!"

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Mr. Robertson. "I know how you feel, Joe. But I don't know what I can do about it. The pity is that what's done can't be undone. If it's true, though, I'll try to make it up to you, Joe."

"I don't see how you kin do dat, Mr. Will."

"No, I don't—but wait—if things are as you say, your family has been wronged, deeply wronged. Maybe I could do something to make it up to them. I could do this. I could give Richard Sanders and Lucindy, when they marry, that little place of Henry Thompson's

over there by Uncle Peter's and the church. I could buy it and give it to them."

"But Brother Sanders ain't gwine to marry Lucindy."

"Oh, ain't he? I thought he was."

"Naw, suh, he's gwine to marry Ella."

"Ella!"

"Yassuh, he likes Ella de best, he says. I think it is because she is de brightes'."

"Well, what are they going to do now?"

"Oh, he don't know nuthin' 'bout Ella and Mr. Bob. I been studyin' 'bout dat. An' I knows a lot 'bout him an' Sally Ramsey. Cindy tol' me. He said if he's gwine to be good, he's got to marry, an' he gwine to marry one of my gals, an' I reckon Ella could keep him as good as anybody else could."

"But, Ella—does she want to marry him?"

"Yassuh, she's crazy to marry him, 'cause Lucindy been thinkin' all de time she gwine to git him, an' she been treatin' de yuther gals scornful."

"Well," said Mr. Robertson after a while, "I suppose I shall have to leave that to you all. If what you say about Ella is true, I don't like to see Richard marry her. But shucks! if I mix in that, I'll probably do more harm than good. The best way is to let you settle your affairs to suit yourself. In a way there would be more justice, anyhow, in giving the little farm to Ella and Richard."

"Mr. Will—"

"Yes, Joe."

"It looks to me like I is de one dat has had all de trouble raisin' dem gals, an' eddicatin' 'em, an' tryin' to keep 'em good. I is de one whut's worked an' slaved an' saved. An' it ain't my fault if dey goes wrong.

I done my bes' wid 'em. An' it looks to me like if anybody's gwine to git dat farm, it ought to be me. Let Richard an' Ella start out like me an' Malviny an' work dey way up, an' you give me de farm."

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Robertson, laughing, "the ruling passion is strong in death. If there's anything coming, you want to get it. I don't know but you are right, though. Well, all right, I'll give you the farm."

"Dat shows, Mr. Will, whut I always said, if you works hard an' lives right, you'll git somep'n in de end."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Robertson. Then all at once he fell sad, as there came over him the realization, "Such it is—and Joe is one of the best of them." He sighed, "Ah, well, it must be admitted, though, that he is the most avaricious. And Bob, Bob, too, in spite of all our care. But it may not be true. It may not be true! Still, Joe's people are honest, and how else could she ever have gotten the medal?"

Then he said aloud, "Joe, do you feel strong enough to walk home now?"

"Yassuh, I think I'm mighty nigh all right now. I reckon I'll have to tell de folks dat a limb fell on me."

"All right, let me see you start off. I'll lead Saladin back."

Joe rose and walked off quite steadily.

Mr. Robertson untied Saladin, remounted his own horse, and leading Saladin, headed for home. His thoughts were busy, "Mamie must not know about this just yet. How shall I manage? It will need a lot of thinking, it will require money, and I can see that the crops are going to fail again. Ay, dear me, there are lots of things to worry about. And, Bob, what am I going to do about Bob?"

When he reached home, Mrs. Robertson said, "Oh, Will, Will, I was so uneasy. What was the matter? The meeting must have lasted a mighty long time."

"Yes, it did last a long time."

"What was the trouble?"

"Well, we had to discuss the Ku Klux Klan from A to Z, and decide what to do about Henry Thompson."

"What did you decide?"

"To put him in jail until the thing blows over.—But where's Bob?"

"I'm uneasy about him, too."

"Why, what's the matter with him?"

"He said Saladin had gotten out of the lot, so he went an hour ago to look for him, and now it's pitch dark. Oh, I wonder where he can be!"

"He'll turn up directly, I suppose. I found Saladin in the creek bottom as I came through, and I've brought him home."

"I wonder how he got out of the gate," said Mrs. Robertson.

"I think the main question now, honey, is, did you put me up some supper?"

"Yes, of course I did, Will. I will get it for you. But if Bob doesn't come back, you will go and look for him, won't you?"

"Oh, that will hardly be necessary. Of late he seems to be paddling his own canoe."

"What do you mean by that, Will?"

"Oh, nothing much, but it seems to me I've seen very little of him in the past few days."

"Will, darling, have you noticed it, too? I believe there's something the matter with Bob."

"Oh, he's getting grown, I reckon," said Mr. Robertson.

"But isn't it awful, Will, to think that he will grow away from us?"

"Yes—but I think I hear him now."

Bob came in. "I couldn't find Saladin anywhere," he said.

"I found him in the bottom," said Mr. Robertson, "and put him in the stable."

"I don't understand how he could have got out," said Bob, "I shut the lot gate myself."

"Well, I'm hungry," said Mr. Robertson; "will you come with us into the dining-room, Bob?"

"If it is just the same to you, Papa, I'm tired, and I believe I'll go to bed."

"Oh, all right. Good night, then, but I want you to go over to the big pasture with me early in the morning."

"Good night, Papa," said Bob, kissed his mother, and went upstairs.

That night Mr. Robertson slept little. He twisted and turned about, till Mrs. Robertson said, "Will, dear, there is something on your mind; can you tell me about it?"

"Well, I have to make a speech about the Ku Klux Klan."

"Oh, Will, Will, can't you let that alone?"

"No, honey, I can't let it alone."

CHAPTER XXXII

EARLY the next morning Mr. Robertson went into Bob's room and waked him, saying, "Get up, son. Go and saddle my horse and Saladin. You will find that Saladin has many bruises and scars on him. But say nothing about 'em. We are not going to do much riding. Bring the horses around to the front and hitch 'em some distance down the avenue toward the big gate."

"All right, Papa," answered Bob, wondering, but afraid to ask what was the matter.

After breakfast they set out for the big pasture in a mutual silence. When they had crossed the railroad track and were riding through the pasture gate, Mr. Robertson said, "Let's turn down to the left here toward the creek where it is shady."

When they reached the swimming hole, he said, "Get down and tie your horse, son. I will tie mine. I want to talk to you."

Bob was so filled with apprehension that his trembling fingers could hardly knot the bridle over a low-hanging limb. "What does he know? What does he know?" was running through his mind.

"We will sit down on this log," said Mr. Robertson, "and you can tell me all about this." He handed the medal to Bob.

"Well, I—I," said Bob, blushing and hanging his head, "where did you get that, Papa?"

"Come, don't fence with me, son. Be at least man enough to tell me about it."

"Oh, Papa, Papa," cried Bob, casting himself on his knees and hiding his face in his hands on the log, "I—I don't know what to say!"

"There's only one thing to say, and that is the truth," answered Mr. Robertson firmly.

"Well," stammered Bob, "it—it was down by the spring. And the fault was mine. She—she liked the medal so—so much, and—and when I—I offered to give it to her, she consented. She—she has always looked up to me, and—and I ought not to have done it. Oh, Papa, does Mama know it?"

"No, Mama doesn't know it."

"Are you going to tell her? Oh, I couldn't bear that she should know!"

"No, I am not going to tell her. But how—how did you come to do it? It doesn't look reasonable to me that it should have been Ella, that it began with Ella."

"No, Papa, it didn't begin with her. It began right here where we are now. It began with Sally, and that was not my fault, Papa, not altogether my fault. Listen, I will tell you about it."

Tearfully he told his father the whole story.

"And how do you feel about it now?" Mr. Robertson asked when the hesitating account was finished.

"Oh, I feel like a wretch, a vile wretch, and I have felt so for weeks. I would give anything, anything if I could undo it, especially about Ella. But—but something came over me, Papa. It—it was stronger than I was, and somehow I—I couldn't help it."

"Yes, yes, son, it was so. I know that. I do not reproach you. It does not become me to reproach you. If I can, I want to help you. Oh, son, son, I was guilty

of the same thing. And I am trying to say to you what I wanted somebody then to say to me."

He paused.

"Yes, it was your mother that saved me. I might have become a Mr. Hiram, a Randy Shallow, or even a Henry Thompson. Do you see where it leads, son?"

"Yes, yes, Papa, I see. I have always known."

"Do you think there is anything that can save you?"

"Oh, if I didn't feel so ashamed of myself when I think of Minnie Deane—"

"I, too, felt that way, but—but my love for your mother overwhelmed even that feeling, and—and I wish I could say that I had made a clean breast of it, but I couldn't do that. It was not until years afterwards that I could tell her, and at last she—she forgave me. And that is one reason why, son, she has tried so hard to—to keep you—from anything of—of that kind."

"Oh, I understand, and—and I promise you and—and her that—that—"

"Yes, son, I know, that—that's all right, son. But you know how Joe tried to bring up his girls. He is nothing but a nigger, still he made a sincere effort, a brave effort. And it was through us that should have been his protectors that the disaster came. Yesterday evening I found him beating Saladin in the creek bottom. That was his revenge. He felt that he could not touch you—or me."

"Or you?"

"Yes, or me. He had a right to feel that I, too, was responsible for your actions. It is a fact, son, that neither you nor I can ever escape responsibility for the actions of each other. Any disgrace falling upon me will attach itself to you. And any honor achieved by

you will reflect some of its light on me. You and I and Mother, son, are bound together indissolubly."

"Oh, I know it."

"I had to try to make it up to Joe as best I could, so I am going to buy Henry Thompson's little farm and give it to him. But I shall have to mortgage the timber land that I had hoped to keep free for you."

"Oh, that's all right, Papa."

"And it makes no difference that that will satisfy Joe. A wrong has been done to Ella that never can be repaired, and in her to a whole race, for she was an aspiration of that race."

"Oh, Papa!"

"Yes, son, and Richard Sanders is going to marry her. We shall always owe a particular debt to Richard Sanders. He doesn't know about you and Ella. And I didn't know, don't now know, what was right about that —that—"

"Wouldn't it be best for me to tell him, and take that debt on myself?"

"You can't do that, son, without further injury to Ella. She must be considered first, for we have already wronged her, and to heap all of the consequences on her head—we couldn't do that."

"No, Papa."

"And, son, most people would say, 'Oh, they are niggers, why bother so much about mere niggers? They would probably be guilty of the same thing with each other, or with other white men. And they don't bother about things of that sort, anyhow. Look at Sally, look at Cindy.'—And all that may be true, son, but that doesn't excuse you or me. Do you see, son?"

"Yes, somebody has to help up."

"That's it, that's it, somebody has to help up. And, son, why could it not be us?"

"Oh, Papa, it can be us!"

"I don't know what the end of it all will be, but the way to any good end must lie along the road of racial self-respect. The white race must respect itself; the black, itself; and they must respect each other. Race hatred must be lessened, not increased. Suppose we recognized their inferiority, but were always fair, always just! And now we have the Ku Klux Klan to foment prejudice and hate. But that will be temporary. It will soon pass."

"Do you think it won't last?"

"No, it can't last. When the people understand it, when they see the consequences of it, it will die of its own wicked folly."

"But it may first cost the life of some of our best people, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it may do that—either directly or indirectly through the mob spirit that it fosters.—But, son, you know that for a while I thought of moving to the City, but I have made up my mind that this is the place for me. This is the place where I amount to something, where they love me, where I may yet do some real good."

"Oh, I am glad, I am glad, and I, too—"

"No, wait, son, you will go to college, and then you will decide for yourself, not now; many things may happen in that time, and you will learn much about yourself. Farming pays less and less. But I am going to make a new start next year. If I have your consent, I am going to mortgage the timber land for enough to buy also some thoroughbred cattle, and make a live-stock farm out of this place, and move the Senters over here.

John Ramsey is going to move, and Joe Williams will be on his own farm. The lower place I will farm as heretofore, at least, for a few years, until I can see how the new experiment turns out."

"Oh, how could you think about asking my consent? You know, you know that whatever you do will seem right and best in my eyes. And besides, I am to blame for the whole—"

"No, no, son, not for all. It is hard to place blame. We have inherited a burden from our ancestors, the consequences of slavery, and we live under that burden, but they did not foresee the consequences. It is hard to foresee the consequences of a bad thing, especially when it is a thing that, for the time being, is pleasant and profitable to us. And every bad thing has so many evil consequences."

"Yes, Papa."

"In their places, we should likely have done what they did. And after all is said and done, it is probably better for the present generation of niggers to be here in the condition in which they find themselves, than in the wilds of Africa. In some way that I do not comprehend, it may be better for us. But I should like for you always to remember that a nigger is still a human being, in most cases an undeveloped human being that needs guidance and protection, and in all cases a human being that has a right to justice and fair dealing."

"Yes, Papa."

"And, son, there will come times when this talk of mine may seem to you soft and sentimental."

"No, no, I never will—"

"Yes, it would seem so to nearly everybody, but when I was a boy, I made up my mind that if ever I had a

son, I would talk out my heart to him. And that is what I am now trying to do."

"Oh, I shall always be grateful and—"

"I have done many things of which I am ashamed, but I know now it is not best to think on them too much. They lame you. It is best to put them behind you, forget them, banish them entirely from your memory. What is done can not be undone; why wear it as a corpse about your neck? But how fine it would be if we could say now with regard to any present thing that is shameful, 'It is shameful; I will do nothing shameful, even to hide a former shame!'"

"Oh, Papa, I'm going to have to tell Mama."

"Yes, son, I hoped you would."

"And it will hurt her so!"

"Yes, son, it will hurt her."

"And before ever I should ask Minnie to marry me, she ought to know?"

"Yes, son, she ought to know."

"Oh, that is hard!"

"Yes, it is hard, but it would be harder still for you if they did not know—if you had to live with them without their knowing. Mama, I know, and Minnie, if she loves you, will help you to forget. And if the knowledge comes to them from you, their pain will not be one-half so great as if it came from some one else. And so you will be set free, as far as you ever can be free."

"Oh, then, I never can be entirely free?"

"No, never so free as if the thing had never been. But freer, possibly, than you think now, for there is also much healing merely in the lapse of time.—And, son, I haven't said anything to you about religion. It seems, somehow, harder to talk about that than about anything

else. Perhaps it is because we all feel that we fall so far below its high standards, but you know how I feel about it."

"Yes, I—"

"Good mawnin', Mr. Will, good mawnin', Mr. Bob." John Ramsey had approached unnoticed with a gun on his shoulder. "I didn't know you all wuz down hyeer. I wuz jes' bruisin' aroun' lookin' for a squir'l. De ole woman wants somep'n to put in de pot."

"Have you heard from Sally, John?" asked Mr. Robertson.

"Yassuh, I got a letter yestiddy evenin'."

"How is she getting on?"

"She's doin' fine, Mr. Will, jes' fine. She writ she's made mighty nigh fifty dollars sence she's been in de City already, an' she say she's gwine to send me some money when she gits a little mo'."

"What is she doing?"

"I don't know, suh, jes' prezackly, but she say business is fine in de City. She says she ain't gwine to ever come back up hyeer. She say things is too slow for her 'round Compton, an' dey's mo' loose money down dar whar she is."

"Well, you are going to move over to Mr. Randy Shallow's place this fall, aren't you?"

"I don't know, suh, I wuz a-thinkin' about it, but den I say to myse'f, 'Nunck-unh, I don't know how Mr. Will gwine to git along widout me!'"

"Well, I am going to get along without you, all right," answered Mr. Robertson.

"Meanin', Mr. Will?"

"Meaning that you are going to move somewhere, and you had better be looking out for a place."

"Waal, suh, of co'se I kin move, but I sorter hates to leave you in de lurch, Mr. Will."

"Don't bother about that," said Mr. Robertson, smiling, "I'll manage to get along."

"Waal, suh, I don't have to move early in de fall, right at de beginnin', so to say, does I?"

"Oh, no, there's no hurry about it. Take your time. I'll help you find another place, if you can't find one for yourself. I am going to make a stock farm out of this place."

"It sho' will make a good un', Mr. Will, whut wid all dis hyeer Johnson grass an' 'Muda grass I been a-fightin' so hard. But I knowed you wouldn't give me up, Mr. Will, 'ceppen you had to. Of co'se I ain't no cattle man, I's a farmer, but den," scratching his head thoughtfully, "I's a putty good cattle man, too."

"Well, next year you may exercise your talents somewhere else. Run along now."

When John was gone, Mr. Robertson said, "Bob, suppose we take a swim. I've got a fancy stroke that I don't believe I ever did show you."

"All right, Papa, I'd just love to," answered Bob joyfully.

As John walked on, peering up in the trees for a squirrel, he was thinking, "Hunh! I kep' my mouth shut dat time all right. But whut he don't know, don't hurt him. If Sally keeps on a-doin' so good, we gwine to move to de City, an' set up a swell boa'din' house. Den, look out, niggers!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

On the Saturday night following, which was July sixteenth, 1921, Mrs. Robertson and Bob were in the sitting-room studying the Sunday-school lesson for the next day, the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Mr. Robertson was walking up and down on the front porch composing his speech for the following Tuesday. At nine-thirty Mrs. Robertson called out, "Will, dear, we are going to bed, will you come?"

"No, honey, I couldn't go to sleep now. I think I will wrestle with this speech an hour or so yet."

"Well, good night, darling."

"Good night, I will come before so very long."

"Good night, Papa," called Bob.

"Good night, son."

His mind recurred straightway to the speech. He was filled with a sort of exaltation to think that his fellow citizens had selected him to make it, especially when there were present others so much more practised in public speaking. A feeling of affection for the people enveloped him. They trusted in him, and they were fundamentally so kind, though so easily turned aside by their passion or prejudice. And there came to him, too, a sobering sense of his kinship with them. God grant he might be able to say something that would be of real value, something that would incline them away from bitterness to harmony! Oh, they needed to pull together, to coöperate, to have respect and love for each other!

As he came to the west end of the porch, his eye happened to catch the road that ran to the bottom gate, and his glance traveled along it to its end as it lay clear in the moonshine, for the moon was nearly full. But stop! what was that at the gate? He could make out the figures of horsemen—one, two, three—ten of them. Now they were all inside the field. They were clustered close together, most of them in the open roadway. They seemed to be lifting their hands up to their heads. What were they doing? Stay! could it be that they were masking their faces? One thing was certain, they wore no white robes, for such garments would have gleamed in the moonshine. But what were they going to do? He watched with bated breath.

They came a little way up the road, then turned to their right, riding in single file down a cotton row. Where could they be going? There was no house inside the field in that direction except Joe Williams's. That must be their destination. What could they want there? They intended mischief to somebody. To whom?—The people at Joe's house must be warned, must be protected. Perhaps he might have time by running, to reach there before the horsemen. He could travel in a straight line; they would probably ride around the curve of the cotton row.

Without pausing to get even his hat, he jumped from the end of the porch to the ground, traversed the flower garden, vaulted the fence, turned sharply to his left, and ran at top speed. Beside the fence of the horse-lot he hurried, down the hill through the cotton, across the spring branch, up the hill through the corn. He could not see around him for the stalks. Would he get there

in time? He hadn't the breath for a shout of warning.

He emerged from the corn at Joe's back fence.

"Halt!" he heard dimly.

He paid no attention to the command, but scrambled over the rail fence, ran, panting, around the house, clambered up on the end of the porch, walked to the middle of it in front of the shut door of the hallway, and there turned to face whatever danger threatened. He could not speak.

A small knot of men on foot were gathered at the front gate. They were masked. One of them was calling, "Richard, Richard Sanders, come out of there! We want you. Come out, or we will shoot."

There was no light in the house, no noise, not a whisper, not a creaking of a board under a cautious footstep. Maybe nobody was at home, or perhaps his labored breathing dulled his hearing. He could be seen but dimly. The rays of the moon could not reach him. He stood in the shadow of the porch's roof.

The voice from the front gate cried, "Whoever you are on that porch, you'd better git out of the way. We want Richard Sanders, and we're goin' to have him!"

Mr. Robertson did not move. He could not speak.

"Watch out," cried the voice, "we are going to shoot!"

Mr. Robertson advanced to the edge of the porch. Struggling for breath, he stammered, "It—it is I, Will Robertson."

"You are not goin' to keep us from gittin' Richard Sanders this time; git out of the way!"

"No, no, you shall not!" cried Mr. Robertson.

"Ketch him, boys! Ketch him and hold him!"

They ran forward in a confused group.

The door opened. A man came out, crying, "Oh, Mr. Will, Mr. Will, don't let 'em shoot in the house. Save me, save me!"

"There he is now, there he is now," some one shouted from the advancing throng. "Git him, git him, git the damned scound'le!"

A shot rang out.

Mr. Robertson swayed, toppled, fell from the edge of the porch forward, full length, face down, on the ground.

The crowd stopped. It stood still.

From it there emerged a single figure, ran rapidly the few intervening steps, knelt by the fallen body, and then cried out heart-brokenly, "My God, somebody has killed Mr. Will!"

Then the man rose erect, tore off his mask, flung it against the earth, faced around, and Harry Senter stood revealed. "Who fired that shot?" he cried. "Who fired it? Oh, God!" he wailed, "somebody has killed the best man in the world."

He threw himself prostrate on the body. The crowd melted away. "Oh, Mr. Will, Mr. Will," he sobbed, "I'll find out who done it, I'll find out who done it, and I'll kill him, so help me God!"

THE END

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